



STATE DEPARTMENT

NEWS CLIPS

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SECRETARY OF STATE**Clinton Urges Ivanishvili To Respect The Rule Of Law**

Friday, October 5, 2012

Foreign Policy

By Josh Rogin

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told Georgia's new power broker Bidzina Ivanishvili directly that the United States is watching to make sure he plays by the rules as his Georgian Dream coalition assumes power following their surprise victory in this week's elections, the State Department said Thursday.

International observers praised the Oct. 1 parliamentary elections in Georgia that unseated President Mikheil Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM) party for the first time since the

2003 Rose Revolution brought a measure of Western-style democracy to the former Soviet bloc state.

Ivanishvili, the eccentric billionaire who led the opposition Georgian Dream coalition to victory while accusing the ruling party of fraud and abuse of the system, is now struggling to figure out whether to work with the UNM — or continue to rail against it. Ivanishvili's party will take over parliament, but his bitter rival Saakashvili will remain president for one more year.

In a long, rambling press conference after the vote, Ivanishvili called for Saakashvili to resign immediately. He later sounded more conciliatory notes, rescinding that call, pledging to work constructively with the president, and promising to make Washington, not Moscow, his first trip abroad.

But on Thursday, the Georgian Dream coalition alleged voting improprieties in 12 provincial polls and called for a series of recounts. Ivanishvili also called for an end to street protests and said that disputes should be handled through legal channels.

Clinton spoke separately with both Saakashvili and Ivanishvili on Thursday. She praised Saakashvili for presiding over open and competitive elections and for his "statesman-like" response to the results, State Department Spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said.

"You know well that the views of this coalition were and still are fundamentally unacceptable for me. There are very deep differences between us and we believe that their views are extremely wrong, but democracy works in a way that Georgian people makes decisions by majority. That's what we of course respect very much," Saakashvili said in his concession speech Oct. 2.

To Ivanishvili, Clinton conveyed congratulations for his coalition's victory and for participating in what was largely a peaceful election. But she had another message for him as well.

"The secretary also thanked Ivanishvili for his pledge to work with his political opponents and underscored the importance of continued respect for the rule of law and democratic norms," Nuland said.

Earlier this week, Sens. John McCain (R-AZ), Joe Lieberman (I-CT), and Lindsey Graham (R-SC), issued a joint statement expressing similar sentiments.

"We urge Georgia's newly-elected leaders to be as magnanimous in victory as their opponents have been in defeat. They must abide by the rule of law, not use the instruments of the state for political retribution," they said, adding that they were "disappointed and troubled" by some of Ivanishvili's initial remarks and by the statements of Georgian Dream leaders, some of whom have called for trials of current government ministers.

Irakli Alasania, Georgian Dream's lead negotiator in forming a new government, responded to reports that Justice Minister Zurab Adeishvili and Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili have left the country by saying, "We will dig all criminals out, whenever they go, and bring them to justice."

His negotiating counterpart, National Security Advisor Giga Bokeria, called Friday for an end to the inflammatory rhetoric.

"We have received a great deal of information about violence and threats of violence. We consider these to be major problems on the path to peacefully concluding the electoral process within the constitutional framework," he said.

Pakistan Freed Of Anti-Terrorism Obligations; US Billions Flow Instead

Saturday, October 6, 2012

McClatchy

By Jonathan S. Landay

The Obama administration has refused for the first time to declare that Pakistan is making progress toward ending alleged military support for Islamic militant groups or preventing al Qaida, the Afghan Taliban or other extremists from staging attacks in Afghanistan.

Even so, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has quietly informed Congress that she's waived the legal restrictions that would have blocked some \$2 billion in U.S. economic and military aid to Pakistan. Disbursing the funds, she said in an official notice, is "important to the national security interests of the United States."

Clinton's decision illustrates how far the administration apparently has determined that it must go, after a near-breakdown in relations, to ensure Pakistan's cooperation in the uphill U.S. effort to prevent Afghanistan collapsing into all-out civil war when American-led international combat forces complete a withdraw by the end of 2014.

Some experts, however, warned that the move might backfire. The waivers could encourage a belief among Pakistani commanders that their cooperation is so crucial that Washington will continue overlooking the Pakistani military's refusal to end what U.S. officials charge is its support for Afghan insurgent groups or to shutter militant sanctuaries, they said.

"The army is going to think that no matter how angry the Americans are at them, they are utterly indispensable and they can violate in any way, shape or form U.S. law and the United States will massage its law to accommodate them," said assistant professor Christine Fair, an expert at Georgetown University. "That's how they are going to read this."

Pir Zubair Shah, an expert with the Council on Foreign Relations, said Clinton's decision might be intended as a warning to Pakistan that aid could be withheld next year if it doesn't end the suspected collusion between its military and its

chief spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, and extremist groups.

"It can be a signal that . . . next time we won't apply a waiver and will block the aid," he said.

The State Department declined to respond to a request for comment.

Islamabad vehemently denies charges by top U.S. officials that the army-run ISI is aiding the Afghan Taliban and allied groups, such as the Haqqani network, as part of a strategy aimed at preventing rival India from gaining influence in Afghanistan after international troops withdraw.

In her Sept. 13 notices, Clinton informed Congress that she was waiving provisions of the 2009 Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act and the State Department's 2012 budget requiring that she certify that Islamabad has met certain conditions before some \$2 billion in economic, military and counter-terrorism assistance can be disbursed.

Pakistan was required to have made progress in "ceasing support, including by any elements within the Pakistani military or its intelligence agency, to extremist groups," especially those that have attacked U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan.

Islamabad also was required to have made progress toward stopping al Qaida, the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network and allied Pakistani extremists "from operating in the territory of Pakistan" and staging attacks in neighboring countries. It also must move toward shutting down "terrorist" bases in the tribal areas and other parts of its country.

Clinton didn't disclose which specific prerequisites Pakistan failed to meet. Those details were classified.

It's the first time that the Obama administration has waived the requirements, something the Bush administration did six times for democracy-related sanctions.

Until now, Clinton had certified Pakistani compliance even though U.S. commanders in Afghanistan and other U.S. officials had for years charged the Pakistani army and the ISI with supporting the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network. In September 2011, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and retired Adm. Mike Mullen, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, explicitly accused the ISI of aiding Haqqani network attacks on U.S. targets in Afghanistan, including a strike against the U.S. Embassy.

Four days before she notified Congress she was waiving the conditions, Clinton decided - under pressure from Congress - to add the Haqqani network to the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. The Pakistani military, which for years has rejected U.S. demands that it move against the Haqqanis' stronghold of North Waziristan, thinks that the group should participate in any settlement to the Afghan war.

Clinton's decision to waive the conditions comes as the United States and Pakistan strive to rebuild a relationship battered by a series of events that began when a CIA contractor shot dead two alleged thieves in Lahore in January 2011. Ties also have worsened over intensified CIA drone strikes, which Pakistan charges are violating its sovereignty and killing civilians.

U.S. commandoes killed Osama bin Laden in May 2011 in Pakistan in a raid kept secret from the Pakistani army, embarrassing and enraging its commanders, and last November, U.S. forces in Afghanistan inadvertently killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in a border post, prompting Pakistan to close the NATO supply routes that the United States needs to ship military equipment out of Afghanistan.

The sides agreed in July to reopen the routes in a first step towards rebuilding ties, which Washington considers vital as the pullout of international forces from Afghanistan continues. It's also seeking Pakistani help in trying to draw the Afghan Taliban into peace negotiations.

**US Concerned Over Americans Participating
In PTI's Peace March**
Saturday, October 6, 2012
Associated Press of Pakistan

US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Marc Grossman says that the US Embassy in Pakistan has been in touch with US citizens participating in the PTI Peace March to South Waziristan, and has informed them about the travel advisory issued by the US Government on traveling to that area.

Speaking to reporters after a nearly one-hour meeting with Interior Minister Rehman Malik, Ambassador Grossman said "They (the US citizens) are in no doubt on where we stand on this issue," said Ambassador Grossman, adding that the US Embassy's Charge D' Affairs Ambassador Richard Hoagland had reached out to the US activists.

Ambassador Grossman said that Interior Minister Malik and he discussed the designation of the

Haqqani Network, the issue of IEDs, counterterrorism and the region.

"Americans recognise who are victims of terrorism, Americans are victims of terrorism, but so many Pakistanis have lost their lives and given their lives in fighting terrorism," said Ambassador Grossman.

Interior Minister Malik said that they were taking action on IEDs, and said that not only have they regulated the flow of fertiliser, but are also restricting its movement in certain areas. "IEDs is a very omni-available bombing device," said the minister, and said that Pakistan's National Counterterrorism IED strategy is working well, and that with Pakistan's efforts, IEDs have been reduced considerably. The colour of the blood, whether that of someone from the US, Afghanistan or Pakistan, was the same, said Malik.

Malik said they were taking all legal and administrative measures, and that they were prepared to take additional measures. Ambassador Grossman said that the US wanted to support Pakistan's policy on IEDs.

"It is not only Pakistan that is being blamed," said Malik, adding that devices were being made in other countries as well.

Concerns on drones conveyed

Pakistan also urged the United States on "common counter-terrorism strategy against the common enemy," as Malik conveyed Islamabad's concerns on drone strikes in the tribal areas to senior American officials.

"We have a common enemy and we must have a common strategy to fight this enemy - Pakistan is committed with the international community in this fight -and we will hit them hard," Malik said standing next to Grossman after their meeting.

Malik acknowledged in a media interaction that there are reservations on the two sides, despite the fact that both have been victims of terror and have been fighting a common enemy in terrorists along the Afghan border. "Our side has conveyed our concerns regarding drone attacks - the people of Pakistan have been voicing this and we hope that this voice of the people of Pakistan will be heard," the Interior Minister said.

Later in the day, Malik met with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. He is also due to meet FBI Director Robert Mueller, and Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano and will participate in a meeting of the US-Pakistan

working group on counterterrorism and law enforcement during his trip to the US capital.

UN Chief Ban Says Sanctions Are Hurting Iranians As Inflation Takes Its Toll

Friday, October 5, 2012

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Iran's general population is feeling the brunt of international sanctions as inflation and unemployment continue to rise and lifesaving medicines are in short supply, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said in a report to the U.N. General Assembly released Friday.

Protesters have taken to the streets of Tehran in recent days as the Iranian currency has plummeted, sharply driving up prices. Iran's rial has lost nearly 40 percent of its value against the U.S. dollar in the past week alone.

The U.N. Security Council has imposed four rounds of sanctions aimed at curtailing Iran's nuclear program, which Iran maintains is peaceful. The U.S. and European Union have also hit the Islamic Republic with sanctions.

"The sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran have had significant effects on the general population, including an escalation in inflation, a rise in commodities and energy costs, an increase in the rate of unemployment and a shortage of necessary items, including medicine," Ban said in his report.

Humanitarian operations have also been hampered, as payment problems have led to a shortage of medicines needed for treating diseases like cancer and heart and respiratory conditions, Ban said.

The sanctions have targeted Iran's vital oil exports and cut off access to international banking networks. Both measures have reduced the amount of foreign currency coming into the country.

The currency crisis has put Iranian leaders under the most pressure from dissent since they crushed the opposition movement after the disputed reelection of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009.

Ahmadinejad's critics have blamed the currency crisis mostly on government monetary policies. They say his administration added to the frenzy to dump rials with policies such as limiting bank interest rates, which led depositors to pull their cash in fear it wouldn't keep pace with inflation.

U.S. officials in Washington say the rial's plunge is due to both Iranian government mismanagement and the bite from tighter sanctions.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Tuesday that the sanctions have had an impact, but that could be quickly remedied if the Iranian government was willing to work with the international community "in a sincere manner."

The West suspects that Iran is using its civilian nuclear program as a cover to develop the capacity to build nuclear weapons. Iran insists its program is geared toward generating electricity and medical radioisotopes to treat cancer patients.

Last month, the four Western powers trying to rein in Iran's nuclear program accused Tehran of ignoring demands to open key nuclear facilities to U.N. inspectors.

The United States, Britain, France and Germany expressed alarm at the latest report from the International Atomic Energy Agency. It said Iran has effectively shut down a probe of a site suspected of being used for work on nuclear weapons development while doubling the number of machines it could use to make the core of nuclear warheads at an underground bunker safe from airborne attack.

In his report to the General Assembly, Ban also noted his concern over Iran's human rights situation, though he said the regime had taken some "positive steps," such as eliminating stoning as a method of execution.

The U.N. chief said he remained "deeply troubled by reports of the increasing number of executions, including in public; continuing amputations and flogging; arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trials, torture and ill treatment; and the severe restrictions targeting media professionals, human rights defenders, lawyers and opposition activists."

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Ban Ki-moon Says Sanctions Having Significant Effects On Iranians

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Ha'aretz

By Gideon Levy

International sanctions on Iran are having "significant" effects on the Iranian people and also appear to be harming humanitarian operations in the country, UN chief Ban Ki-moon said in a report to the UN General Assembly released on Friday.

The Iranian currency has fallen during the past year and over the last ten days alone has lost a third of its value, sparking street protests. U.S. official and other Western officials blame the drop on a combination of economic mismanagement and sanctions.

Iran is under UN, U.S. and European Union sanctions for refusing to halt nuclear enrichment, which Western powers and their allies fear is part of a plan to amass the capability to produce nuclear weapons. Tehran denies the charge, saying its atomic work is for medicine and generating electricity.

"The sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran have had significant effects on the general population, including an escalation in inflation, a rise in commodities and energy costs, an increase in the rate of unemployment and a shortage of necessary items, including medicine," Ban said in the report.

Iran has been hit with four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions between 2006 and 2010 for refusing to halt its nuclear enrichment program. Western nations originally said the sanctions would hurt the government and not the people of Iran, but now acknowledge the wider impact.

Britain, France and Germany have called for more EU sanctions, but there are unlikely be further UN sanctions because of resistance from Russia and China. Moscow has repeatedly criticized unilateral U.S. and EU sanctions against Tehran.

Russia and China have reluctantly supported all four rounds of UN sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program but worked hard to weaken the measures in negotiations on the Security Council resolutions before their adoption.

"The sanctions also appear to be affecting humanitarian operations in the country," Ban wrote in the report, dated August 22, to the 193-member General Assembly on the "Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

"Even companies that have obtained the requisite license to import food and medicine are facing difficulties in finding third-country banks to process the transactions," he said.

No 'serious' proposals from Iran

Ban said due to the payment problems some medical companies have stopped exporting medicine to Iran, leading to a reported shortage of drugs used to treat various illnesses, including cancer, heart and respiratory conditions and multiple sclerosis.

Ban said a number of Iranian aid groups and activists had expressed concern about inflation, rising commodity prices and the sanctions compounding each other to have "far-reaching effects on the general population."

For nearly 10 years, various major powers have negotiated unsuccessfully with Iran to persuade it to halt its nuclear program in exchange for political and economic incentives. Since 2006, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China have led the so-called "P5-plus-one" talks with Tehran.

The European Union has started discussing the possibility of a broad trade embargo against Iran, moving beyond the web of energy, business and financial restrictions imposed so far. But some states fear aggressive moves could backfire and rally the people behind Iran's leaders.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton held out the possibility on Wednesday that sanctions on Iran could be eased quickly if Tehran worked with major powers to address questions about its nuclear program.

Western diplomats said Iran continually offers proposals about how it could end the nuclear stand-off with the West, but they are not bringing them to the six-power group — the five permanent Security Council members and Germany — and do not appear to be sincere about resolving the crisis.

"The Iranians float all sorts of proposals outside the framework (of the six-power group) but nothing serious," a senior Western diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

Another Western diplomat said that Iranian proposals always involve the removal of sanctions before they would suspend sensitive nuclear activities, which he said was unacceptable.

Last week Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu drew his "red line" for Iran's nuclear program, saying Tehran may be on the brink of an atom bomb in less than a year and suggesting that Israel might have to make a decision on whether to use military force against Iranian nuclear sites by spring 2013.

US Must Not Wait For Change In Iran's Nuclear Policies: Iranian Lawmaker

Friday, October 5, 2012

Xinhua

TEHRAN, Oct. 5 (Xinhua) — A senior Iranian lawmaker, Evaz Heidarpour, has said Washington must not expect any changes in Iran's nuclear

policies as they are tied to the country's national interests, Press TV reported on Friday.

"The U.S. must not wait for a change in the Islamic republic's policies on the nuclear program, since Iran has not and will not back down on issues tied to its national interests," Heidarpour, a member of the Majlis (parliament) National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, was quoted as saying.

The United States has no other choice but to recognize the rights of the Iranian nation and revise its policies toward Tehran, Heidarpour said.

The U.S.-engineered sanctions against Iran have nothing to do with Tehran's nuclear energy program, Heidarpour said, adding that "The U.S. has imposed the sanctions to humiliate the Iranian nation."

"Iran is experiencing the most severe kinds of sanctions which cannot be intensified any further; so it can be said that the sanctions have no effective impact on Iran's economy," he argued.

The UN Security Council imposed four rounds of sanctions on Iran between 2006 and 2010 over its refusal to halt its nuclear enrichment program, which Western countries suspect could be used to develop nuclear weapons.

The United States and European Union have imposed and expanded sanctions of their own over the years despite Iran's insistence on the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Wednesday that sanctions on Iran could be "remedied in short order" if the Islamic Republic works sincerely with the international community over its controversial nuclear program.

On Friday, a senior Iranian cleric said the Iranian nation will resist the West's ongoing economic pressure and overcome their "economic war," semi-official Fars news agency reported.

The Islamic republic will not surrender to pressure, Tehran's interim Friday Prayers Leader Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami said, adding that "the global arrogance will fail in its all-out economic war against Iran."

"These pressure won't last. The Iranian nation has experienced how to live with problems, but they (Western powers) don't have this experience," he was quoted as saying.

On Tuesday, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the West has launched an "economic battle" against the Islamic republic.

On Wednesday, Supreme Leader of Islamic republic Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that sanctions and pressure cannot force the Iranian nation to surrender as the Iranians have always withstood pressure and grown more powerful.

Also, Iranian parliament's presiding board member Abdolreza Mesri said Friday that the West must acknowledge that the sanctions against the Islamic republic were "wrong from the very basis," Fars reported.

Mesri said that Iran has always been open to dialogue over its nuclear energy program.

On Friday, Hossein Sobhaninia, another member of Iran's parliament's presiding board, said that Western sanctions have been imposed on Iran to force the Islamic republic to abandon its "inalienable right to use peaceful nuclear energy," Press TV reported.

"What Westerners are pursuing with sanctions against Iran is hurting (the country's) economic programs, creating discontent among people, and ultimately convincing Iran to give in to their demands and give up its nuclear and enrichment programs," Sobhaninia was quoted as saying.

Sobhaninia added that diplomatic negotiations between Iran and the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany — the so-called P5+1 — is a logical way to reduce sensitivities regarding Iran's nuclear energy program.

Iran has held three rounds of talks with the P5+1 over its uranium enrichment program since mid-April, but made no breakthrough.

On Friday, Press TV also quoted Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi as saying that any military attacks on Iran "will result in a heavy defeat for the aggressors."

"Iran has acquired such a capability that the aggressor forces will suffer an unbelievable and crushing defeat in case of any attack or intervention," Fadavi was quoted as saying.

"Iran has not recognized the power of the global arrogance even for a moment since the victory of the Islamic revolution in 1979," he said.

The enemy seeks to confront Iran by imposing economic and political sanctions and desecrating Islamic sanctities, he said, adding that the enemy does not dare to have a direct confrontation with Iranian forces.

The United States and Israel have not ruled out the possibility of a strike on Iran's nuclear energy facilities.

The United States and its Western allies believe Iran is working toward a nuclear weapon capability. Tehran denies that, saying its atomic program is "peaceful."

UN Chief Says Sanctions Harm Iranians Friday, October 5, 2012

ABC News

Iran's general population is feeling the brunt of international sanctions as inflation and unemployment continue to rise and lifesaving medicines are in short supply, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said in a report to the U.N. General Assembly released Friday.

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U.S. officials in Washington say the rial's plunge is due to both Iranian government mismanagement and the bite from tighter sanctions.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Tuesday that the sanctions have had an impact, but that could be quickly remedied if the Iranian government was willing to work with the international community "in a sincere manner."

The West suspects that Iran is using its civilian nuclear program as a cover to develop the capacity to build nuclear weapons. Iran insists its program is geared toward generating electricity and medical radioisotopes to treat cancer patients.

Last month, the four Western powers trying to rein in Iran's nuclear program accused Tehran of ignoring demands to open key nuclear facilities to U.N. inspectors.

The United States, Britain, France and Germany expressed alarm at the latest report from the International Atomic Energy Agency. It said Iran has effectively shut down a probe of a site suspected of being used for work on nuclear weapons development while doubling the number of machines it could use to make the core of nuclear warheads at an underground bunker safe from airborne attack.

In his report to the General Assembly, Ban also noted his concern over Iran's human rights situation, though he said the regime had taken some "positive steps," such as eliminating stoning as a method of execution.

The U.N. chief said he remained "deeply troubled by reports of the increasing number of executions, including in public; continuing amputations and flogging; arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trials, torture and ill treatment; and the severe restrictions targeting media professionals, human rights defenders, lawyers and opposition activists."

Britain Unveils Major Effort To Fight Global Online Crime

Friday, October 5, 2012

Voice of America

Britain has launched a multi-million-dollar global initiative to help fight organized criminals and terrorists using the Internet. The plan was rolled out at an international gathering in Budapest aimed at making the Internet more secure.

Speaking at the international "Budapest Conference on Cyberspace," British Foreign Minister William Hague said Britain wants to lead a worldwide effort to stem the rapidly growing number of cyberspace attacks threatening companies and governments.

"It has never been easier to become a cybercriminal than it is today," said Hague. "It is now possible to buy off-the-shelf malicious software designed to steal bank details for as little as 3,000 [British] pounds, including access to a 24-hour technical support line. As foreign secretary, I see frequent evidence of deliberate and organized attacks against intellectual and government networks in the United Kingdom."

Repelling attacks

He said that when London hosted the Summer Olympic Games, some 200 emails and dozens of British government departments were targeted by cybercriminals attempting to obtain sensitive government information.

Hague explained that earlier this year, hackers managed to steal the equivalent of 20 million pages of sensitive information from what he called "a well-protected international company." A large manufacturer allegedly was targeted during negotiations with an unidentified foreign government.

Hague said the attacks prompted his government to allocate an additional amount of roughly \$1 billion over the next four years to improve the nation's Internet capabilities. Additionally, Britain will invest more than \$3.2 million annually to help other less fortunate countries tackle cyber crime.

"Cybercriminals and terrorists should have no refuge online, just as they should have no sanctuary offline. I can therefore announce today that the United Kingdom is a developing a new 'center for global cybersecurity capacity building' in the United Kingdom," said Hague. "And, we will be investing 2 million [British] pounds a year to offer countries independent advice on how to build secure and resilient cyberspace, improving coordination and promoting good governance online."

Supporting free expression

Hague said concern over illicit Internet activities should not be used as an excuse to limit freedom of expression, even in some established democracies.

The minister did not mention conference host Hungary, although the country was criticized

about legislation that opponents say limits press freedom and increases government control of online and traditional media.

Hungary's center-right government says the media law is in line with international standards.

Hague also criticized nations for jailing bloggers and shutting down human rights websites, as well as the video-sharing site YouTube, where a U.S. produced anti-Islam film was posted, prompting violent protests.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi said the conference aims to better protect not just companies and governments but all users, including children.

"We must protect them, just as we need to enhance international security respecting human and civil rights. Our conference will strive to tackle these questions, which concern all of us and which determine our children's future," said Martonyi.

Supporting the program

Hungary hopes more countries will embrace the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, which has been signed or ratified by nearly 50 nations since its inception in 2001.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who did not attend the gathering, said in a video message that Washington supports the international attempt to secure cyberspace.

The Budapest conference, which ended Friday, was centered on the theme "with trust and security for freedom and prosperity." More than 600 delegates from 60 nations, representing governments, the private sector, civil society and the scientific community, attended.

The event is the first follow-up gathering to the 2011 London Conference on Cyberspace. A similar meeting will be held in October 2013, in South Korea, one of the world's most Internet-savvy nations.

South Korean Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Kim Sung-Han has made it clear that besides fighting cybercrime, the Seoul gathering also wants to tackle "challenges" such as "personal data loss" and malicious content, including pornography, as well as cyberbullying and Internet addiction.

Hillary Rodham Clinton Helping Big Bird Fly The Coop

Friday, October 5, 2012

Roll Call

By Warren Rojas

"Sesame Street's" days are numbered.

GOP hopeful Mitt Romney promised as much during Tuesday's debate. And President Barack Obama has now seized upon that threat in his latest stump speeches.

But rather than talk about the problem, the mirth-makers who keep the Internet so very interesting have decided to marry the current crisis to a beloved political meme.

Hillary Clinton May Run For Office In 2016

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Guilfordian College Guilfordian

By Bryan Dooley

In the heat of this election season, speculation is raging about whether Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will run for the office of president of the United States again in 2016. Some members of the campus community weighed in on the idea.

"I think Hillary Clinton will run for President," said Ken Gilmore, associate professor of political science. "But I think she will take the next two years testing the waters and recuperating from an exhausting 20 years of public service — as First Lady, Senator, and Secretary of State."

If Clinton decides to run, many say it will enliven the Democratic Party.

"If she does run, the base will certainly be energized," said senior Dwight Price, a College Democrats student representative. "She was expected to win the Democratic nomination in 2008."

Although she did not win the nomination, she came close.

"She came within a hair's breadth of winning the nomination in 2008," said Gilmore. "Don't forget her years in the Senate. She is beyond qualified for the office."

Robert Duncan, visiting assistant professor of political science, agrees with Gilmore's sentiments. He also points out the significance of the U.S. possibly electing a female president.

"It's about damn time society in the U.S. took the blinders off and saw people for who they are and what they contribute to the country," Duncan said. "There are still women being marginalized and put down in the world. I think it's time for the U.S. to carry the flag and set the model."

If Clinton does run, she will have to contend with the often cited invisible barrier that prevents

women from advancing in politics and the workplace, also referred to as the "glass ceiling."

According to Maria Rosales, associate professor of political science, women are often stereotyped as being more nurturing and compassionate.

"Although women are over 50 percent of the population, only 17 percent of congress is female," Rosales said. "It is improving for women. More people are voting for women than ever before, but the stereotypes remain."

Duncan expands on this point.

"The good old boys who have been there forever resent women in positions of power," Duncan said. "For example: the Republicans' restrictions on women's access to healthcare ... (like) telling women if they should get pregnant, they should not have an abortion."

Duncan continued, "That mindset has to be broken. This illustrates the glass ceiling, the male chauvinistic attitude towards women, as subservient, lesser humans. That really frosts my pumpkin."

Clinton just might be the right person to shatter the glass ceiling, according to Price.

"I think it would be great for her to run," Price said. "She has advocated for universal healthcare coverage, the rights of women, the LGBTQ community, and religious freedom."

Ambassador Melanne Verveer: Do Women Hinder Their Own Advancement?

Friday, October 5, 2012

Forbes

By Moira Forbes

This country's foreign policy efforts have never been solely about traditional power politics. One example: Melanne Verveer. In 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton created an unprecedented position, "Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues," naming Verveer as the inaugural appointment. Dedicated to elevating "the political, economic, and social advancement of women around the world," the role speaks to America's greater foreign policy mission. Basic rights and access to opportunities helps to create environments for more freedom in the world, ultimately ensuring greater security for the US and our national interests. And women's advancement is key to this.

In creating this new State Department position, Secretary Clinton underscored that empowering women is a moral, economic, and ultimately a

critical foreign policy priority for the United States. Beyond our borders, having societies empower and unleash the brainpower of over half the world's population is a benefit to us all.

Mobilizing 'concrete support' for women's rights though around the world is a daunting, and seemingly insurmountable goal, particularly when success is often difficult to define and when progress can take years – if not decades – to come to fruition. Not to mention spearheading these efforts with tenuous and sensitive diplomatic relationships, and in countries where women's rights have been severely restricted for centuries. No small task for any leader but given Ambassador Verveer's experience as the former Chief-of-Staff to Hillary Clinton and more recently, as the co-founder of the Vital Voices, she already has an extraordinary track record of empowering women's leadership globally.

I recently sat down with Ambassador Verveer who not only discussed the world's gender gap, but she also candidly described that it's not just repressed regimes holding women back. Rather, she believes that far too often women are holding themselves back. Lack of self-esteem, according to the Ambassador, remains one of the greatest barriers to women's advancement and an area where "some of the strongest contributions" can be made to change the future landscape of global leadership.

Hear the 'World's Ambassador To Women' discuss what women fear if they land a seat at the table, what Hillary Clinton has learned from her after their many years of collaboration, and why she sees success as a life-long learning process. "Women's political empowerment is, perhaps, the toughest nut to crack anywhere in the world," admitted Ambassador Verveer. Yet as her past accomplishments and her current role reflect, barriers, whatever they may be, are never permanent.

For Woman In Senate Race, Uphill Fight For Female Votes

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Peter Applebome

HARTFORD — If Linda E. McMahon is elected to the United States Senate from Connecticut, her victory will be due in large part to women like Dorothy Martin-Neville.

Dr. Martin-Neville said she voted for Richard Blumenthal in Ms. McMahon's unsuccessful Senate race two years ago. She is a registered Democrat

who says she will vote for President Obama, would rather see Democrats keep control of the Senate and has a brother who worked for Representative Barney Frank of Massachusetts. But after meeting Ms. McMahon, the Republican nominee, at several of the approximately 200 all-female get-togethers Ms. McMahon has held across the state, she said she became an enthusiastic supporter.

"I believe we need more women in politics," said Dr. Martin-Neville, a psychotherapist and motivational speaker. "There are women in Washington who are working to create the common good, and we need more of them. I believe in Linda's approach to work across party lines and work for people, not the parties."

In her 2010 race, the exit poll conducted by Edison Research showed that Ms. McMahon, the former professional wrestling executive, lost the women's vote by 19 percentage points, dooming a candidacy in which she spent \$50 million of her own money. This time, she has focused relentlessly on female voters in a year when Democrats have tried to make the women's vote a trump card nationally.

A Quinnipiac University poll released on Thursday showed her tied with Representative Christopher S. Murphy, her Democratic opponent, and while she still does better among men, the poll showed Mr. Murphy with only a six-point advantage among women as they seek the Senate seat being vacated by Joseph I. Lieberman, an independent.

And on the eve of their first debate Sunday, one of four this month, their entirely different approaches to courting women voters are at the heart of an election that has become a window onto the ways gender issues, explicitly and implicitly, can play out.

Ms. McMahon has based her appeal on her record as a successful businesswoman and on a strikingly personal attempt to bond with women voters and, no doubt, to overcome the negative connotations many took last time from the wrestling company that created her fortune.

She frequently refers to her Women for Linda network and has hosted gatherings of 35 or 40 women in living rooms across the state. Last month, she drew 519 supporters at a Women for Linda rally in Norwalk featuring former Gov. M. Jodi Rell of Connecticut and Senators Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska. She has run advertisements featuring a softer, kinder, more grandmotherly presence than the tough C.E.O. whose wrestling-industry background turned off women in 2010.

They feature her reminiscing about how she met her husband in church, how she found out she was pregnant the day before graduating from college and how she overcame hard times, including a bankruptcy.

"I'm a mom," she says in one campaign video as a piano plays gently in the background. "I've been a working mom, I've been a stay-at-home mom. I'm a grandmother. And I believe that I bring to the table many skills, many attributes that others who are in this race don't have."

Mr. Murphy, who has the support of women's groups like Nara and the National Organization for Women, is hammering at traditional Democratic support for abortion rights and access to contraception.

He has focused on Ms. McMahon's support for the Blunt amendment, which would have allowed employers to refuse to cover contraception and other medical costs, and her commitment to overturning the Affordable Care Act. His speeches are full of dire warnings about the stakes for women on issues like federal financing for Planned Parenthood, control of the Supreme Court and protecting *Roe v. Wade* if a McMahon victory tips control of the Senate to the Republicans.

Mr. Murphy frequently notes the violent, sometimes misogynistic content of her wrestling empire and her party's opposition to abortion.

"She says that women shouldn't pay attention to her positions on the issues; they should just pay attention to her gender," Mr. Murphy said at an appearance last week. "That's insulting."

He added, "She's trying to pull one over on the people of this state."

Of course, the race has been about more than gender. Ms. McMahon has pummeled Mr. Murphy on his failings in personal finance, including a 2007 foreclosure action for missing mortgage payments and a 2003 lawsuit for nonpayment of rent. And Democrats have jumped on a statement by Ms. McMahon that she would like to see provisions that they say could phase out Social Security.

But women's issues have seldom been far from the surface. Ms. McMahon, showing an ability to withstand issues that have hurt Republicans elsewhere, said it was absurd for Mr. Murphy to attack her on women's issues.

"Murphy calls me antiwomen, but, Chris, take a look," she says in a recent television ad. "I am a woman, a pro-choice woman." It concludes, "I'm

Linda McMahon, an independent-minded woman, and I approve this message."

Her Web site, like much of her campaign material, is dominated by pictures of her with women: in a living room, at a luncheon meeting, on a factory floor. It features a female-friendly Pinterest site.

Asked during her primary race to name a senator whom she most admires or hopes to emulate, Ms. McMahon picked the nation's most prominent female Democrat.

"Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has spent her life barreling through glass ceilings, only to be viciously attacked by her opponents," she said in an e-mail. "But she has persevered and gone on to accomplish great things and serve our country admirably. We need more strong women in government."

To many Democrats, Ms. McMahon's improved showing with women is more a product of shrewd marketing and seemingly limitless spending — more of her own money than anyone has spent to win a Senate seat — than anything meaningful.

"This is a recrafting, a rebranding, a digitally enhanced makeover, but she's the same person," said Victoria Fennell, a Democratic Town Committee member from Hartford. "When the dust settles, it will be the issues that matter, and he's the one with the right policies for women."

On women's issues, as on others, Ms. McMahon often tends to avoid specifics. Some of her supporters say her history in business trumps social issues like abortion or contraception.

"Social issues shouldn't even be part of the debate," said Jayme Stevenson, the first selectman of Darien and a McMahon supporter. "We need to create jobs."

Still, Ms. McMahon's ability to attract women, particularly women in business, has been a main reason polls show her tied in a race for a seat that had been assumed to be safely Democratic.

"She's very genuine, and she's a role model for businesswomen across the state," said Maureen Boylan, who owns a corporate-events planning business. "I think she represents the values of working women in Connecticut."

Why A Long Presidential Race Is Good For Democracy

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Washington Post

By Frank Partnoy

Americans love to complain that our presidential campaigns seem to go on forever. Between the primaries, conventions, rallies, debates and the rest, they take months, even years. Why don't we elect a leader in a month or so, as many other countries, such as Britain and Canada, do?

Many voters might think they can make just as good a choice in 60 days as in 60 weeks, but in short, they're wrong.

While a shorter campaign would save money and time, and would probably reduce voter fatigue, our long electoral process is good for voters and good for democracy. Here are a few reasons why.

Most fundamentally, a lengthy campaign forces us to slow down and fully process information about the candidates before voting. Abundant research shows that we tend to react instantly to others' words, speech and facial expressions. For example, we immediately judge people with attractive faces, often erroneously, to be more trustworthy, intelligent, sensitive and even modest. Our 24-hour access to news, social media and the Internet feeds our quick biological impulses and speeds them up as we are constantly making snap judgments — and broadcasting them — based on new information.

Just as we often respond to an e-mail too soon or gobble down a piece of chocolate cake we were intending to save for later, we tend to react too quickly to new and salient information about presidential candidates, especially salacious revelations, policy flip-flops or inelegant remarks on hot-button issues. We judge candidates first and then maybe fact-check them later. A lengthy electoral process forces us to wait before we can vote in a way we might regret.

Of course, sometimes quick judgments can be good ones. For example, we are reasonably accurate at instantly detecting emotions, such as anger or surprise. Studies have found that we can guess which law firms make higher profits by looking at partners' old yearbook photos. Experiments even show that people can distinguish Democrats from Republicans just by looking at faces. In one recent study, participants examined the full lips and high cheekbones of Republican congresswomen and pronounced them more feminine-looking than their Democratic counterparts.

So yes, if we had only a few minutes to choose a president, we could assess some of the candidates' characteristics quickly based on their appearance, demeanor and experience. But research shows that our decisions about people

are more accurate if we have more time to think about them. Good judgment about a presidential candidate is more like a car accelerating up a long hill than a light bulb turning on. It takes awhile before we can make an informed decision.

What if the election had been held immediately after President Obama's remarks in July that "if you've got a business, you didn't build that"? Or right after Mitt Romney's "47 percent" video emerged a couple of weeks ago? Ideally, we should take time to process what the candidates say. Substance should matter more than timing. That is why the debates don't take place the night before the election.

A long campaign also generates better candidates; filtering out those who are not ready for prime time. Recall how prospective voters flitted among the contenders during the Republican primaries. Rep. Michele Bachmann (Minn.) surged in the polls after winning the Ames Straw Poll in August but was the first GOP candidate to drop out after the Iowa caucuses. And nearly every Republican hopeful — Herman Cain, Rick Perry, Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum — had a turn as a front-runner. If the primaries hadn't lasted so long, Perry might have won simply because the race finished before he forgot the third federal agency he wanted to cut.

A drawn-out campaign is also better for democracy because it reduces the sense of inevitability that can prevail in shorter elections. While weeding out those who can't handle the prolonged spotlight, longer campaigns also give underdogs a chance to prove themselves and establish name recognition. Just think about 2008: Hillary Rodham Clinton, the Democrats' supposedly preordained nominee, was defeated by a relatively unknown junior senator from Illinois who went on to become president.

Another benefit is that the candidates who emerge from long campaigns are better tested, more experienced and arguably more fit for the job. It's one of the longest, most public job interviews because the presidency is one of the most important, most public jobs a person can have. There is no obvious way to train to be president, but a presidential campaign seems to work reasonably well. As Vice President Dan Quayle said of Bill Clinton in 1992: "If he runs the country as well as he ran the campaign, we'll be all right."

Candidates become better potential presidents as they campaign. They get to know the electorate. The constant fundraising, stump speeches and polling force them to be more in touch with voters.

And when they say or do things that appear out of touch — as when Romney tried to make a \$10,000 bet with Perry during a debate, or when Obama said that private-sector jobs were doing "just fine" — they have a chance to learn from their gaffes and recover.

Candidates develop expertise during the campaign and become more comfortable with the unique challenges of the presidency. Ronald Reagan arguably became a great communicator by running for president four times. And Romney learned from publicly criticizing the London Olympics in July, just as Obama learned from publicly praising his pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright Jr., in 2008 and later distancing himself from Wright's controversial views.

Voters benefit, too, becoming more secure in their decisions after a lengthy campaign. One of the problems with political polarization today is that people take too little time to make decisions and react purely along party lines. Even partisan voters would be better off delaying their voting decisions as long as possible. A firm election date is like a deadline for making choices: It forces us to delay, but not too much.

The office of the president has been compared to the office of a private company's chief executive. But the best corporate succession plans take more time than a presidential election — sometimes much more. Top candidates are groomed and challenged for years before the board of directors votes for the company's next leader. If we want to emulate business, elections should be even longer.

Since the Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United decision, complaints about the influence of money in U.S. elections have spiked, and a long campaign certainly gives candidates and super PACs more time to raise and spend money. But in a faster campaign, the deluge of money would still happen; it would just be more concentrated, timing-wise. Besides, the political advertising in a long campaign isn't entirely wasteful: It creates jobs and provides at least some useful information.

We might get tired of watching and thinking about an election — in July, a Pew study found that 56 percent of respondents already found the 2012 campaign to be too long and dull — but the exercise is good for us. Citizens of a democracy must work their political and policy muscles to stay fit.

We might demand instant gratification in nearly every aspect of our lives, but that's why a long,

drawn-out presidential race is more important than ever. The seemingly never-ending campaign is saving us from ourselves — and our increasingly limited attention spans.

But I still am glad it's almost over.

Frank Partnoy, the George E. Barrett Professor of Law and Finance at the University of San Diego, is the author of "Wait: The Art and Science of Delay."

John Kerry's Elizabeth Warren Dilemma

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Boston Magazine

By Jason Schwartz

If Washington, DC, is a city of poorly guarded secrets, perhaps the least well guarded is Senator John Kerry's desire to be secretary of state. Hillary Clinton has made it clear that she will not return for a second term in that role, and if President Obama is reelected, Kerry would certainly be a favorite for the post. From his emergency diplomatic relations with Afghanistan to his work chairing the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Kerry has been one of Obama's go-to guys for international affairs. Considering that our senior senator was among the first high-profile politicians to support Obama's presidential bid, you could even say that the president owes him one.

So what, short of a Mitt Romney victory this November, could thwart Kerry's ambitions? An Elizabeth Warren victory.

With control of the Senate so tightly contested between the two parties, Warren's race with Senator Scott Brown could well decide whether the D's or the R's hold the majority. So suppose Warren beats Brown in a tight vote. Also suppose that Obama wins reelection, and Kerry is given the keys to the State Department.

That would mean Massachusetts would need a new senator, of course, so just like when Ted Kennedy passed away, Governor Deval Patrick would appoint a temporary one immediately, then hold a special election in 145 to 160 days. It's not hard to imagine Brown running for Kerry's seat. It is hard to imagine who'd run against him on the Democratic ticket, especially since the Dems will soon need a gubernatorial candidate as well.

"Where are the Democrats going to find a credible candidate for governor and a credible candidate for Senate if Kerry is successful?" wonders Philip Johnston, a former Massachusetts Democratic Party chairman. With Patrick's term up in two

years, Johnston points out, candidates like the rejuvenated Attorney General Martha Coakley or state Treasurer Steve Grossman might choose to hold off on a Senate bid and instead run for governor (besides, we've already seen how Coakley versus Brown plays out).

You could trot out all the names we've already heard: City Year cofounder Alan Khazei, Newton Mayor Setti Warren, Celtics co-owner Steve Pagliuca, our various representatives in the House, but none of them inspires much confidence against a candidate as tough as Brown. "I think there is a bench issue right now for the Democrats," Johnston says.

It could well be that if Obama wins again and taps Kerry for his cabinet, he'd be handing a crucial Senate seat back to the GOP. That doesn't seem like something the president would want to do. So while we'd like to think we know who Kerry will be voting for in this November's Senate race, one of his colleagues might just want to check his ballot.

LIBYA

Turkey Detains 2 In Connection With Killings In Libya

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Scott Shane And Tim Arango

WASHINGTON — American officials confirmed Turkish news reports on Friday that two Tunisian men had been detained in Turkey in connection with the killing of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans in the attack on a United States diplomatic post in Libya on Sept. 11.

But the officials said they were awaiting more information from the Turkish authorities, and it remained unclear whether the two were considered to be suspects or witnesses in the violent attack in Benghazi, which fell on the 11th anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attacks.

Kanal D, a private Turkish television network, said the two were stopped at Ataturk Airport in Istanbul on Wednesday as they tried to enter the country using false passports.

Another report, in Sabah, a Turkish newspaper, said that immigration officials had matched the names of the men, who were said to be in their mid-30s, to a list of possible suspects that American intelligence agencies had given to security services in the region.

Turkish police officials declined to comment.

A State Department spokesman, Mark C. Toner, said Friday that American officials "have been in contact with the Turkish government on this issue," but he referred more detailed inquiries to the F.B.I. Asked about the detained Tunisians, an F.B.I. spokesman, Paul E. Bresson, said officials were not "ready to discuss at this point or in any way characterize what their involvement may or may not have been."

President Obama has repeatedly pledged to "bring to justice" those responsible for the deaths of Mr. Stevens, a popular ambassador whose death provoked a protest by Benghazi residents, as well as Sean Smith, a computer specialist, and Tyrone S. Woods and Glen A. Doherty, both former members of the Navy SEALs.

But investigators have faced many obstacles. So far, Libyan officials have issued sometimes conflicting reports about arrests that offer little hard information. And security concerns had prevented an F.B.I. team from visiting Benghazi until Thursday, when they spent several hours on the scene of the attack.

At a news conference on Thursday, Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. declined to comment in detail on the investigation. But he suggested that the F.B.I. team's limited access to the crime scene in Benghazi had not prevented investigators from following other leads.

"You should not assume that all that we could do or have been doing is restricted solely to Benghazi," Mr. Holder said. "There are a variety of other places in country and outside the country where relevant things could be done and have been done."

American investigators have been compiling information on the militants implicated in the attack, drawing in part on witness accounts and interviews with suspected attackers identifying some as members of a local militia, Ansar al-Shariah. That raises questions about what kind of role the detained Tunisians might have played.

Senior American military and counterterrorism officials say they are preparing for operations to kill or capture the suspected perpetrators, though any American action will be politically delicate. Much of the Libyan population is friendly to the United States, which supported the revolution that overthrew Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, while some of the country's many militias are not. Unilateral American military action, including drone strikes or commando raids, could set off resentment that might cut across such divides.

Scott Shane reported from Washington, and Tim Arango from Istanbul. Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting from Istanbul.

State Dept. Denied Plane Request For Security Team In Libya

Friday, October 5, 2012

CNN

By Jamie Crawford, Jill Dougherty

The State Department earlier this year denied a request by the security team at the U.S. Embassy in Libya for continued use of a plane for security personnel and diplomatic business, according to an internal State Department email provided to CNN.

U.S. Special Operations helping gather intel on Libyan militia

While the presence of the plane in Libya would not have stopped the deadly September 11 attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, questions are emerging over whether the agency properly heeded security concerns and requests like this one from their diplomats in Libya.

Also: Tunisians questioned regarding possible role in Benghazi attack

The email, provided to CNN by a U.S. government source, was signed by Miki Rankin of the Near East Bureau (NEA), which oversees State Department operations in the Middle East and North Africa. Ambassador Christopher Stevens, who was killed along with three other Americans in what U.S. intelligence believes was a terrorist assault on the Benghazi post, is copied on the May 3 email.

U.S. gathers information for possible Libya targets

The email was first reported by ABC News on Friday.

In the message, Rankin tells Stevens and other officials whose names were redacted, that Patrick Kennedy, under secretary for management, "has determined that support for Embassy Tripoli using the DC-3 will be terminated immediately."

The State Department considered the request of the Security Support Team at the embassy, however "it was decided that, if needed, NEA will charter a special flight for their final departure."

Security support teams are U.S. Special Forces deployed to high threat areas to protect American diplomats. The State Department works in cooperation with the Defense Department to determine deployments.

When asked about the denial spelled out in the email, the State Department said the decision was not extraordinary.

"This is a very common practice in places where there's no commercial airline service," Deputy State Department spokesman Mark Toner told reporters on Friday. "When commercial service was subsequently established, we then moved that asset back to other State Department business."

But he said the agency essentially uses its aircraft when there are no commercial flights available.

Toner said the aircraft had been moved to Libya from Iraq.

A senior administration official told CNN that a chartered aircraft was delivered to assist with the evacuation of American personnel on the evening of the Benghazi attack.

"So [the] assertion that it affected our real-time response doesn't really ring true," the official told CNN.

CNN reported previously that security at the diplomatic mission was enhanced due to concerns prompted by previous incidents in Benghazi.

After a U.N. convoy was attacked in Benghazi last April, a small team of U.S. Special Forces commandos was sent to the consulate to assess security, an Obama administration official told CNN's Barbara Starr last week.

The U.S. military team recommended a number of changes that included sandbag reinforcement of guard positions at the site. They also conducted training for local Libyan security personnel.

Analysts who follow the situation said the aircraft denial by the State Department likely springs from tension between a finite level of resources and budgetary constraints around the globe.

"It looks like someone made a funding decision just based on what I can read into this," Fred Burton, a former diplomatic security agent with the State Department, told CNN.

"At the end of the day, people don't like to realize this but it is a fact of life," Burton, now with Stratfor, a security research firm, said. "There are operational costs to these kinds of protection requirements that nobody really cares about until there is tragedy, and then someone says why wasn't there a plane there? Maybe at that moment in time they couldn't afford to have it there."

Such planes add to the operational capabilities for diplomatic missions. In the early days of the

revolution that overthrew Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi, the planes were used to fly in cash from neighboring Tunisia to pay U.S. embassy staff in the absence of a formal banking structure in Libya.

Members of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton earlier this week outlining 13 instances in the six months prior to the Benghazi attack that represented a "clear pattern of security threats" that justified increased security for U.S. personnel and facilities there, the letter said.

Clinton pledged full cooperation with committee's investigation. The Oversight panel is scheduled to hear from two State Department officials involved with security in Libya at a hearing next week.

Separately, the State Department has launched a review board led by former Ambassador Thomas Pickering to investigate the attack. The board has 90 days to deliver its findings to Congress.

List Of Questions Surrounding Attack On Consulate In Libya Keeps Growing

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Deseret (UT) News

The list of questions surrounding last month's terrorist attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, keeps growing.

But more than just questions loom. Americans need to wonder why the Obama administration still had not taken action to secure the property and the sensitive information it contains more than three weeks after the attack. Locals say they worry Americans would not be safe there, but a sufficient military force ought to be able to secure the compound long enough to remove its contents.

Libya, after all, is a nation the United States helped liberate recently.

Instead, Washington Post reporters were able to visit the consulate this week, and they sent back disturbing reports of sensitive papers strewn across the floor and minimal security provided by the owner of the property. The documents contained the names and personal information of Libyans who worked closely with the consulate, including those who provided security. Several copies of the ambassador's itinerary, including names of Libyans he was to meet — people not publicly known to be friendly with him — also were there.

Those people now face extreme safety risks from the radical forces that stormed the compound, something the U.S. government does not deny.

In addition, the documents that remain contain details about security plans. They raise questions about what other sorts of documents may have been looted by radicals in the immediate aftermath of the attacks.

A team of FBI investigators finally visited Benghazi this week but left after only 12 hours on the ground, the Associated Press reported.

Congress has begun its own investigations into the Sept. 11 attack, which killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also has started a probe. In the meantime, it would be nice to know what the administration plans to do to secure the consulate, or at least how long it intends to leave it vulnerable.

The Post reported that a number of Libyan contractors and security personnel have attempted to contact the U.S. government with concerns about their own safety, but have not received answers. Why is that?

Reports have circulated that U.S. personnel had asked for increased security in the days leading up to the attack. The investigations need to determine whether these reports are true. Regardless, the administration needs to explain why it did not automatically increase security at sensitive diplomatic posts on a day as obviously meaningful to the nation's enemies as the anniversary of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Why was the administration so slow to acknowledge the possibility that the attack was a premeditated terrorist assault? Its reluctance to do so seemed to lend credence to the idea the attack was tied to a YouTube video, which may in turn have prompted further demonstrations against U.S. embassies in other parts of the world.

After the Benghazi attacks, why was the United States so slow to fortify the crime scene and preserve evidence? Any official investigation into the attack, as well as any hope of identifying the attackers and bringing them to justice, has been seriously compromised by allowing the scene and its evidence to become contaminated.

The slow response sends a disturbing message to potential allies in troubled parts of the world. If sensitive personnel records will be left lying on the floor nearly a month after an attack that should have been anticipated, why should any local

residents want to cooperate to help the U.S. government?

The Ambassador's Alarm

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Charleston (SC) Post and Courier

A senior spokesman for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently aimed distinctly undiplomatic — and unprintable — language at a CNN reporter.

That's what you'd expect from a schoolyard bully, asserting himself to someone much smaller than himself. But in this stunning case, it undermined the widespread assumption that CNN and the Obama administration are buddies.

Maybe Secretary Clinton's spokesman thought he was talking to a reporter for Fox News ...

This profane dustup, if it can be called that, came about through CNN's discovery and subsequent airing (in part) of slain Ambassador Christopher Stevens' journal, which was found in the burned-out rubble of the U.S. Consulate in Ben-ghazi, Libya. In the journal, apparently discovered by CNN four days after the murder of Mr. Stevens and three other Americans, the ambassador recorded his concern that a jihadist attack on the consulate was in the offing, and that he himself was on an al-Qaida hit list.

That, of course, flew in the face of initial State Department and White House claims that the attack was "spontaneous" and made in response to a short video that ridiculed the Prophet Mohammed.

The FBI finally gained access to the consulate site Thursday — after a four-week delay. Let's hope that's not too late for the investigation to help bring the guilty parties to justice.

But also of serious public interest are answers to the following questions:

Were Amb. Stevens' prescient concerns forwarded to Washington? If so, what steps were taken to beef up security at the consulate? Was any effort made by either the U.S. or Libyan governments to secure classified material after the sacking of the consulate?

And most intriguing of all, did the White House and/or the State Department have intelligence foreshadowing events in Benghazi and at a score of other U.S. diplomatic posts in the Muslim World on Sept. 11?

Obama Administration Scandals Proving To Be More Deadly Than Others

Saturday, October 6, 2012

6/9/2016 18 of 102 pages

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**By Jack Kelly**

Because it resulted in the resignation of a president, Watergate had the most profound consequences of any political scandal. But was it our worst?

No one was killed or injured. Nor were Cabinet officers or members of Congress bribed to provide benefits at taxpayer expense to special interest groups, as in the two earlier scandals mentioned in history books — Teapot Dome (1921-24), and Credit Mobilier (1872-73).

Since Watergate, these scandals have drawn a lot of attention:

- Iran-Contra (1986). The Reagan administration secretly sold weapons to Iran, and used the proceeds to finance anti-Communist guerrillas in Nicaragua. The defense secretary, the national security adviser and a military adviser to the National Security Council were convicted of deceiving Congress. Their convictions were overturned.

- Robert Novak mentioned in a 2005 column that Valerie Plame, wife of former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, worked at the CIA. Mr. Novak learned of Ms. Plame's occupation from an apparently inadvertent disclosure by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. She worked at CIA headquarters, so there was no violation of the Intelligence Identities Protection Act. But Irving "Scooter" Libby, chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney, was convicted of lying to the FBI about when he learned where Ms. Plame worked, and who he told about it.

- In 2007, Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez fired eight U.S. attorneys, allegedly for political reasons. No laws were broken, because U.S. attorneys are political appointees, who may be fired at any time for any reason, but Congress investigated anyway. Mr. Gonzalez resigned.

As in Watergate, no Americans were killed or injured in these "scandals," no money was taken from taxpayers. Not so in these:

- Security was "substandard" at our consulate in Benghazi, where Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans were killed. The attack was the work of al-Qaida, the administration learned within 24 hours. But senior officials — including the president — lied about it for more than a week.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton also falsely described security at the consulate as

"robust," and denied, falsely, that the CIA had suffered an intelligence loss.

- More than 300 Mexicans and two U.S. law enforcement officers have been killed by guns the Obama administration deliberately let "walk" across the border to Mexican drug cartels. When the inspector general for the Department of Justice investigated, the White House refused to cooperate. The president claimed, falsely, the operation began during the Bush administration. The chairman of the House Oversight Committee suspects a cover-up.

- To boost President Barack Obama's political prospects, senior White House aides disclosed sensitive intelligence information. As a result of their disclosures, a British operation in Yemen was blown; the Pakistani doctor who helped us locate Osama bin Laden's hideout was arrested and tortured; the mullahs in Iran were given clues to how to combat cyber attacks on their nuclear program; and a bullseye may have been put on the Navy SEALs who killed bin Laden.

- More than 80 percent of the subsidies for "green" energy have gone to firms owned or run by the president's contributors. Nearly all the firms are in financial trouble. None have produced the energy or the jobs promised.

Iran-Contra dominated the news for months. But there's been little mention in the "mainstream" media so far of the consequences of "substandard" security at the consulate in Benghazi, or of the administration's dissimulations about it.

The Valerie Plame affair got much more attention from the media than have the leaks from the White House that Democrats as well as Republicans on the intelligence committees consider dangerous breaches of national security.

The "gunwalking" scandal is much bigger than even congressional investigators suspected, according to an investigative report broadcast on Univision recently. But except for the Spanish language network, the scandal has been invisible to broadcast television.

Teapot Dome and Credit Mobilier were big stories for years. But from them taxpayers got just a light trim, compared to the scalping they're getting on auto bailouts and green energy subsidies.

The seriousness of the offenses doesn't seem to matter. So what is it that makes a scandal "scandalous?"

A Republican president, obviously.

AF/PAK**Panetta Says Karzai Should Thank Allied Forces**

Friday, October 5, 2012

Associated Press

By Lolita C. Baldor

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Defense Secretary Leon Panetta lashed back at Afghan President Hamid Karzai Friday, saying the Afghan leader should say thank you now and then to the allied forces who are fighting and dying there, rather than criticizing them.

Panetta was responding to Karzai's complaints Thursday that the U.S. is failing to go after militants based in Pakistan, and instead is concentrating on the insurgents in Afghanistan.

"We have made progress in Afghanistan because there are men and women in uniform who have been willing to fight and die for Afghanistan's sovereignty," Panetta snapped, as he spoke with reporters traveling with him to South America. "Those lives were lost fighting the right enemy not the wrong enemy and I think it would be helpful if the president, every once in a while, expressed his thanks for the sacrifices that have been made by those who have fought and died for Afghanistan, rather than criticizing them."

The uncharacteristic shot from Panetta comes as tensions between the two countries have escalated over the increase in insider attacks, where Afghan security forces or insurgents dressed in their uniforms have turned their guns on coalition troops. And it raises the temperature on the heels of the announcement that, as of last weekend, 2,000 U.S. troops had lost their lives in the war.

At the same time, however, there is persistent frustration with the insurgents, including members of the Haqqani network, who wage attacks against coalition forces in Afghanistan and can then retreat to their safe havens in Pakistan. U.S. officials have repeatedly pressed Islamabad to more forcefully go after the insurgents, including Haqqani factions in and around North Waziristan.

But, the U.S. also routinely uses drone strikes across the border into Pakistan to target and kill militants.

Karzai spoke at a press conference, complaining that if NATO troops want to go after terrorists they need to go where their safe havens are. And he also expressed frustration that Afghan forces aren't getting the weapons they need from NATO

allies, suggesting Afghanistan might have to go to other countries such as China and Russia to get them.

Panetta's sharp retort also comes just days before he and other NATO defense ministers meet in Brussels to discuss the war and the road ahead, as allied forces begin to withdraw and transfer security to the Afghans. And the exchanges could fuel concerns among NATO allies that the insider attacks may be eroding trust between coalition and Afghan troops, making security transition all the more difficult.

Panetta last met with Karzai in May when he traveled to Afghanistan to meet with commanders and visit troops before the holidays. Both Panetta and Marine Gen. John Allen, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, will attend the NATO meeting.

Asked whether the insider attacks could prompt some allies to seek a faster withdrawal from Afghanistan, Panetta reaffirmed support for the current timeline that has combat troops leaving the warzone by the end of 2014 and turning security over to the Afghan forces. Officials have said that as many as 20,000 U.S. troops could remain over time, to continue training and counterterrorism efforts.

"My goal is to make clear to NATO and to our allies that we are taking all steps necessary to confront this issue and that it should not be allowed to deter us from the plan that General Allen put in place," Panetta said.

To date there have been 53 NATO troops killed in insider attacks, prompting military leaders to briefly curtail some partnered operations and set up a new approval process for those that involve smaller units.

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US Suspects Haqqani Tie To Afghan Insider Attacks

Friday, October 5, 2012

Associated Press

By Robert Burns

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Haqqani insurgent network, based in Pakistan and with ties to al-Qaida, is suspected of being a driving force behind a significant number of the "insider" attacks by Afghan forces that have killed or wounded more than 130 U.S. and allied troops this year, American officials said Friday.

Until now, officials had said the attacks seemed to stem either from personal grievances against the allies or from Taliban infiltration. The Taliban has publicly claimed to be orchestrating the campaign to subvert the U.S.-Afghan alliance.

New data provided to The Associated Press this week also reveal that in addition to 35 U.S. and allied troops killed in insider attacks last year, 61 were wounded. Those included 19 in a single attack in the eastern province of Laghman on April 16, 2011, in which six American servicemen were killed. Thus far in 2012 there have been 53 killed and at least 80 wounded, the figures showed.

Haqqani involvement in the plotting would add a new dimension to that group's insurgent activity, which has been marked largely by spectacular attacks against targets inside Kabul.

Haqqani leaders have pledged allegiance to Taliban leader Mullah Omar, but the group largely operates independently. The two groups have a shared interest in evicting foreign forces.

The U.S. officials said that although there is no hard evidence tying the Haqqanis to specific attacks, the pattern of shootings and the movements and backgrounds of some of the shooters — including travel into Pakistan shortly before the shootings — point to a likely connection to the group Washington last month officially labeled a terrorist organization.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss inferences drawn from internal U.S. military analyses of a string of murderous attacks over the past two years that have angered the allies, embarrassed the Afghan government and threatened to undermine the war effort. The officials were not authorized to make the comments publicly.

The U.S.-led military coalition recently slowed, temporarily, its partnering with some Afghan forces, partly in response to a recent spike in insider killings.

The data on the attacks provided to the AP reveal that shootings in 2012 have been concentrated more in the Pashtun south and the swath of Pashtun territory that forms the southern approaches to Kabul. In 2011 the attack pattern was more dispersed, although the largest number occurred in the south and the east.

The internal military analyses, based in part on that data, indicate that a number of shooters were recruited into the Afghan army or police forces from Pashtun areas in eastern Afghanistan — including the provinces of Paktika, Paktia and

Khost — where the Haqqanis wield great influence, the officials said.

In some cases these Afghans — most of whom had served in uniform for six months or less — returned to those areas on leave from their army or police duties, or briefly crossed into Pakistan, shortly before turning their guns on American or allied soldiers, the officials said.

Officials say the Afghan government is now watching such movements more closely and taking other steps to prevent additional insider attacks, although the U.S. believes they will not end.

Of the 38 reported attacks so far this year, 10 happened in Kandahar province, the spiritual and traditional home of the Taliban, and 10 happened in neighboring Helmand province, also a heavily Pashtun area.

Ten others were in or near a Haqqani-influenced swath of territory along the southern approaches to Kabul, including the latest attack on Sept. 29 in which Army Sgt. 1st Class Daniel T. Metcalfe, 29, of Liverpool, N.Y., and a U.S. civilian were killed by Afghan soldiers. They were killed in the same district of Wardak province, southwest of Kabul, where a July 3 attack by a rogue Afghan soldier wounded five American soldiers.

"The truth of it is, the removal of this threat completely would be extremely difficult because of the varying nature of the motivations" of the attackers, said Australian Brig. Gen. Roger Noble, a senior operations officer on the staff of the Kabul-based international coalition.

Noble said that while he knew of no Haqqani ties to the attacks, the killings are a means of dividing the Afghans from their allies that is "right up their alley."

Jeffrey Dressler, an analyst at the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War, who has extensively studied the Haqqani network, said Friday that U.S. suspicions may be well-founded.

"If we accept the notion that a proportion of the 'insider attacks' are due to infiltration, then it is absolutely plausible to assume that the Haqqanis are responsible for a portion of those," Dressler said in an email exchange. "The tactic of 'insider attacks' is certainly a potent one, so I would also suspect that the insurgency is doing all it can to increase the frequency and lethality of the incidents."

The Haqqani network has the backing of elements within the Pakistani security establishment and is

regarded as one of Afghanistan's most experienced and sophisticated insurgent organizations.

The network maintains a safe haven in North Waziristan, Pakistan, across Afghanistan's southeastern border. The Pakistani Army has consistently refused to launch a military operation in North Waziristan despite the presence there of al-Qaida senior leaders.

Australian Maj. Gen. Stephen Day, the plans chief for the international coalition's joint command, said in an interview that the Haqqanis are a more troublesome military challenge than the Taliban.

"They represent the most dangerous threat because they are the best trained, best resourced opponent we have," Day said Thursday. He was not speaking about the question of a Haqqani link to insider attacks.

When the number and lethality of insider attacks began to accelerate early this year, U.S. and coalition officials were reluctant to release details, including those cases in which the shooter missed or wounded but did not kill his target. The attacks were dismissed as isolated incidents. That changed over the summer as top U.S., Afghan and NATO officials began speaking about them more and publicly pressing for solutions.

On Friday the AP was given a previously unreleased set of data about 2012 and 2011 insider attacks.

The data show that in addition to the 53 U.S. and allied personnel killed so far this year, more than 80 have been wounded. Although the coalition had previously said there were 21 attacks killing 35 allied personnel in 2011, it had not said that another 61 were wounded.

The statistics also show a previously unreported pattern of attacks happening either in multiple locations on the same day or on consecutive days. This has been the case 10 times so far this year, and Noble said he and other officials are unable to explain the significance of this.

Associated Press writer Deb Riechmann contributed to this report.

Robert Burns can be followed on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/robertburnsAP>

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Karzai Denies Plan To Stay In Power, Chides U.S. On Security Assurances

Thursday, October 4, 2012

Washington Post

By Sayed Salahuddin

KABUL — Afghan President Hamid Karzai denied Thursday that he intends to stay in power by blocking a presidential election set for 2014, and he accused NATO and the United States of failing to equip the Afghan armed forces adequately enough to counter cross-border attacks from Pakistan.

Karzai, who first assumed power in a transitional capacity soon after U.S.-backed Afghan forces drove the radical Islamist Taliban movement from Kabul in November 2001, is barred by the Afghan constitution from running for president again when his second term ends in 2014, a critical year when all foreign combat troops are scheduled to withdraw.

Some Afghan opposition groups and Western analysts say Karzai could cite growing insecurity to block the elections and seek to prolong his stay in office by changing the constitution. Karzai rejected those suggestions.

"Any election, with whatever flaws, is better than an illegitimate government," he told a news conference.

"Therefore, elections will be held definitely, 100 percent and on time," he said, adding that no circumstance, insecurity or "foreign propaganda" would prevent them.

Karzai used the occasion to accuse unspecified Western media outlets of engaging in "psychological warfare" by painting a gloomy picture of Afghanistan after the 2014 withdrawal of foreign troops, despite international pledges to bankroll the Afghan security forces and provide annual cash aid.

He said that he had raised the issue with President Obama during a recent video conference and discussed it with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in a meeting in the United States last week. He questioned whether the alleged "psychological warfare" was intended to weaken Afghanistan's hand in security talks with the United States.

The Afghan president said he was seeking U.S. assurances that a strategic security pact, which provides for a U.S. presence and the use of some military bases in Afghanistan beyond 2014, would stabilize the country and target the roots of armed

militants. He was apparently referring to Pakistan, which formerly supported the Taliban and where militant leaders live and operate.

Karzai has been pushing NATO and the United States for years to halt operations in Afghan villages and instead hit the militants' sanctuaries in Pakistan.

Citing rocket attacks originating in Pakistan, he accused Washington of violating an agreement to defend Afghanistan against foreign attacks until Kabul gains the capability of self-defense.

"We have raised this issue seriously with America," he said. "America explicitly said to us that they are not ready for defense."

Karzai has come under growing public criticism for not responding to the cross-border firing. He said Afghanistan cannot retaliate because it does not have the means to hit the locations from which the rockets are fired.

Because of what he described as U.S. and NATO failure to equip the Afghan air and ground forces with the gear it badly needs, Karzai said he is considering buying the equipment from China, Russia or India.

Afghan Official Blames Taliban For Insider Attacks

Friday, October 5, 2012

Washington Times

By Kristina Wong, The Washington Times

A top Afghan official said Thursday that he has believed for years that most insider attacks on foreign troops have resulted from the Taliban's infiltration of Afghanistan's security forces — an assessment that contradicts Pentagon conclusions.

The insider attacks — in which Afghan soldiers and police turn their weapons on their international coalition trainers — have killed more than 50 foreign troops this year, and frayed trust between NATO and Afghan forces.

The Pentagon for months has attributed the majority of such attacks to personal grievances and cultural clashes between Afghan and coalition forces.

"I think it's absolutely a majority of it is a terrorist infiltration in the ranks," Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister H.E. Jawed Ludin said Thursday at a press briefing at the Afghan Embassy in Washington. "We've always believed this."

Yet as recently as Aug. 23, Marine Gen. John Allen, the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, told reporters that only 25 percent of

insider attacks have been carried out by Taliban infiltrators.

Mr. Ludin called claims that the killings have been due to personal grievances "unfounded," and pointed out that coalition and Afghan troops have been working together for a decade.

"Some people who think this is essentially a cultural thing vastly overstate and actually really ignore the fact that we've been doing this for 10 years now, and this really has come in the last six months," he said.

Mr. Ludin said that Taliban infiltrators among Afghanistan's security forces had been overlooked in the rush to meet NATO recruiting targets in the last few years, as the international coalition moves to withdraw all combat troops by the end of 2014.

"This is really in the last ... two to three years when we had to go out and do a very large scale recruitment because we had to really meet the targets, the recruitment targets set for us by the transition process," the Afghan Foreign Ministry official said.

"I suppose what happened in that process is that we perhaps overlooked some of the crucial screening requirements, and as a result, the enemy used that as an opportunity to infiltrate," Mr. Ludin added. "Infiltration has not been a new phenomenon."

Imran Khan Plans Rally Against CIA Drone Attacks In Pakistan Tribal Area

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Washington Post

By Richard Leiby

Islamabad, Pakistan — In his upstart campaign to become Pakistan's next prime minister, Imran Khan, a magnetic former cricket star and ardent foe of U.S. policy, draws delirious crowds by the tens of thousands who seemingly would follow him anywhere. But this weekend, Khan, who wants to lead his supporters into the dangerous tribal region to protest CIA drone attacks, appears to be headed for a roadblock: Pakistan's formidable military.

Khan has promised to stage a massive rally Sunday in South Waziristan, where the Pakistani army has tamped down but not defeated a fierce Islamist insurgency. Khan picked the location partly for political stagecraft: For years, he has called for an end to the drone campaign, which rains missiles on al-Qaeda and other militant groups in Pakistan's tribal areas, including South Waziristan.

This week, Khan, who for two successive years has polled as the nation's most popular politician, assembled about 35 drone opponents, principally from the U.S. women-led antiwar group Codepink, to join what he calls his "tsunami" for change. Now the question dominating the political dialogue is whether that wave will be allowed to crash into Taliban territory.

The military insists that the decision rests with the civilian leadership, but, in fact, the army controls access to the restive tribal belt, which borders Afghanistan. The debate highlights tensions inherent in Pakistan's governance: Although the politicians in Parliament and the executive branch have a vote on domestic and foreign policy, the army and its spy services essentially hold veto power.

"This is a peace march. We are not there to pick a fight with anyone," Khan said in an interview Thursday. "The army, if they think they can't provide protection beyond a certain point, they'll tell us that."

In the past, some analysts have portrayed Khan as a military-backed candidate because of his support for some right-wing Islamists who are considered proxies for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the chief spy agency. But as his party, Tehrik-i-Insaaf (Justice Movement), has gained significant popular support, he has been talking more forcefully about reining in the security establishment to make it bow before the constitution.

In the interview at his spacious but simply appointed home outside the capital, he described major political party leaders as "nurtured by military dictators." Referring to the generals, he said, "They don't allow natural leadership to come up because they want controllables."

100,000 expected

Khan's plan is to depart Saturday from Islamabad with a convoy, including foreigners and journalists, to reach the South Waziristan border by nightfall and then head to the rally site about 30 miles farther west.

Local authorities have voiced concern about the march, which Khan's party predicts will draw 100,000 people. (Previous rallies in Lahore and Karachi drew double that or more.) Pakistan's seven Federally Administered Tribal Areas are generally off-limits to anyone except the people who live there.

The rally-goers risk attack by the Pakistani Taliban, an insurgent branch that has been

particularly ruthless in its war against Pakistan's government, beheading soldiers and releasing videos of the slaughter.

Khan said he had secured pledges of protection from some tribal elders in South Waziristan who sounded out the Pakistani Taliban and heard back no objections. But the insurgent group, known here as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, said Friday that it has no intention of providing security for the candidate.

It denounced him as a "liberal secular person" and toady of the West.

"We don't need any sympathy from him," spokesman Ihsan-ullah-Ihsan said in an e-mail to the news media. "What are our plans against anyone? Revealing them is against military tactics, so we are not going to state anything about that."

One concern within the army is that a bombing or other attack against the marchers would highlight that South Waziristan is still not pacified even though military operations began there three years ago — a case that is likely to be made by the media if such an incident were to occur.

"We're not going to risk our foreign guests in any sort of incident," Khan said. If Taliban leaders "tell us we don't want you to come there, or just come to the border, we'll do that."

The Pakistani Parliament has passed resolutions three times in recent years demanding an end to CIA drone attacks, which began in 2004 and have markedly increased under President Obama's administration — estimated to number nearly 200.

U.S. officials have no intention of stopping their use: The U.S. military sees the remotely piloted armed craft as an efficient, effective weapon to eliminate hard-core Islamist militants that plague both the U.S. and Pakistani armies. Officials say targeting is far more surgically precise than at the beginning of the program.

Despite overwhelming public opposition, drone attacks have continued — with the tacit approval, some analysts say, of the Pakistani army, intelligence service and government leaders.

Khan said the point of the march is to publicize the strikes' civilian casualties, or as he put it in a newspaper op-ed Thursday, "a trail of dead women, dead children and dead old people with no one held accountable."

Some of Khan's critics say the march is nothing more than a dangerous publicity stunt to play to the anti-Americanism rampant in Pakistan.

"Imran is an ignorant man and likes to live in his dreams, but the government is fully cognizant of its responsibilities and cannot allow any adventurism in the tribal areas where the situation is already fragile," Masood Kousar, the governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which adjoins the tribal belt, told the Express Tribune, an English-language daily.

In the interview, Khan retorted: "The whole idea is to draw attention to this plight. It is not meant to show some bravado."

Cricket hero

Twenty years ago, Khan gained the undying affection of many of his countrymen as the first (and so far only) cricket team captain to lead Pakistan to a World Cup victory. He turned politician in the mid-'90s, forming his own party, and has been running relentlessly in hopes of capturing a significant bloc of seats in parliamentary elections expected to be held in March.

On Thursday, he talked politics into the evening as many Pakistanis had their radios and TV sets fixed on an International Cricket Council World Twenty20 semifinals match, in which Pakistan fell to Sri Lanka.

Instead his mind was on his past forays into the tribal region to research a book, "Warrior Race," his 1993 account of his travels throughout the area where his own Pashtun family tree has roots.

"I don't know where they will stop us," he said of the weekend caravan. "If they allow us to go where we want to hold the rally, it will be fascinating. You will actually see this stark country. It's wild and actually quite striking."

Michele Langevine Leiby and Saleem Mehsud contributed to this report.

Americans In Pakistan To Protest Drone Strikes

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Zarar Khan, Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — A group of American anti-war activists are in Pakistan to join a march into the country's tribal belt to protest U.S. drone strikes in the rugged northwest territory. Their presence has energized organizers behind the protest but also added to concerns that Islamist militants will target the weekend event.

The two-day march — in reality a long convoy — is to be led by Imran Khan, the former cricket

star-turned-politician who has become a top critic of the American drone strikes in Pakistan.

It is to start Saturday in Islamabad and end in a town in South Waziristan, a tribal region that has been a major focus of drone strikes as well as the scene of a Pakistani army offensive against militants.

Khan, like many Pakistanis, alleges that the drone strikes have killed large numbers of innocent civilians and terrorized the tribes living along the Afghan border.

The U.S. rarely discusses the top-secret program, but American officials have said the majority of those killed are Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaida militants and that the missiles used in the strikes are very precise.

The American activists — around three dozen representatives of the U.S.-based activist group CODEPINK — along with Clive Stafford Smith, founder of the London-based legal advocacy organization Reprieve, want to march with Khan and publicize the plight of communities affected by the U.S. drones.

Ahead of the march, local media carried reports Friday of alleged suicide bombings planned against the demonstration and a pamphlet distributed in a town along the march route warned participants they would face danger. The main Pakistani Taliban faction issued a statement criticizing the event.

The foreign activists, meanwhile, met with relatives of people said to have been killed in drone attacks. The group also marched in the capital's Jinnah Supermarket, chanting "Stop, stop drone attacks!" and singing "We are marching to Waziristan."

One placard said: "Drones fly, Children die."

Sherabaz Khan, 45, said he lost two brothers in a March 17, 2011, drone strike in Datta Khel, a town in North Waziristan. "My brothers were attending a tribal council to settle a business dispute in a timber deal, and they were killed," he said. "None of the people killed were militants."

Many of the foreigners expressed sympathy. "We have learned here from victims' families how innocent people, children and women are being killed. Enough is enough. We should stop these attacks," said Linda Wenning of Portland, Oregon.

Access to Pakistan's tribal regions is heavily restricted, and foreigners for the most part are forbidden from entering; it was unclear whether the Westerners wishing to participate in the anti-

drone march would get permission to enter. South Waziristan has theoretically been under the army's control since its late 2009 operation there, but militants still roam the area.

Ahsanullah Ahsan, the spokesman for the main Pakistani Taliban faction, issued a statement Friday calling Khan, the ex-cricket star, a "slave of the West" and saying that the militants "don't need any sympathy" from such "a secular and liberal person."

Ahsan refused to reveal anything about the militants' plans regarding the march, but added: "Imran Khan's so-called Peace March is not in sympathy for drone-hit Muslims. Instead, it's an attempt by him to increase his political stature."

The local newspapers carried short items referring to an Interior Ministry warning that several suicide bombers planned to attack the march. Separately, pamphlets signed by a group calling itself the Army of the Caliphate were distributed in Tank, a town just outside South Waziristan. The fliers criticized Khan as an "agent of America, Israel and Jews."

"People are sincerely and emphatically advised to stay away from the public meeting, and anyone suffering any loss of life will himself be responsible in this world and in the world afterward," the documents warned.

Officials with Khan's political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, said late Friday there were no plans to stop the march or change its ultimate destination, despite the warnings from militants groups. The demonstrators intend to reach Kotkai, a town in South Waziristan, and stage a rally there that they hope will attract tens of thousands of people.

On Thursday, Khan told a press conference that South Waziristan tribal leaders had assured him that he and his entourage would be protected there. Still, he did allude to the possibility that entering the tribal area might not be possible, saying that the marchers would go as far as they could, and stage their rally wherever they decided to stop.

Associated Press Writer Nahal Toosi contributed to this report.

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Code Pink Activists Warned Of Possible Terrorist Strike Against Anti-drone Rally In Pakistan

Saturday, October 6, 2012

McClatchy

By Saeed Shah, McClatchy Newspapers

U.S. diplomats Friday warned a group of American peace activists not to attend a rally against U.S. missile strikes scheduled for this weekend, saying terrorists have threatened to attack the demonstration.

Separately, the Pakistani Taliban warned Friday that they oppose the rally, which is being led by Imran Khan, an internationally famous cricket player who has become one of Pakistan's most popular opposition politicians largely on the basis of his outspoken criticism of the U.S. role in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The demonstration, which has been organized by Khan's political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, is scheduled to leave Islamabad Saturday and hopes to enter South Waziristan, part of the militant-plagued tribal area that is considered a no-go zone, on Sunday as a protest against the use of unmanned drones to attack suspected al Qaeda and Taliban militants.

The 32 American peace campaigners are from Code Pink, an advocacy group known in Washington for disrupting congressional hearings and other high-profile activities. Their presence in Waziristan, a place where no Westerners go, and certainly not Western women, would be novel. Also on the march will be British-American lawyer Clive Stafford Smith and members of his human-rights organization, Reprieve, best known for its advocacy work on behalf of detainees held at the U.S. prison camps at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

According to the peace activists, U.S. diplomats alerted them in person to information from what the diplomats said were "credible sources" that a suicide attack is planned against the march. The activists, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were briefed in confidence, said the diplomats showed them a piece of paper that contained a one-line summary of the threat and implored them not to go, but they did not provide further details of the danger. U.S. officials confirmed the account.

The Code Pink activists, who staged a small demonstration in Islamabad on Friday night, insisted they would go ahead.

"The people of Waziristan are threatened every day by drones. They live in a constant state of

anxiety and terror," said Paki Wieland, 69, of Northampton, Mass., explaining why she planned to ignore the U.S. warning.

"We are here to expose the false narrative that there are no civilian casualties from the drones," said Alli McCracken, 23, of Washington, who described herself as a full-time activist with Code Pink. "We believe that people are innocent until proven guilty."

Much of the tribal area is under the de facto rule of the Pakistani Taliban and other Islamist extremists, including al Qaida and the Haqqani Network, a deadly Afghan insurgent group that the United States recently declared a terrorist organization. The Pakistani military, which has forts and other bases across the tribal area, controls some parts, including Kotkai, the village in South Waziristan that the march intends to reach.

Pakistan's Interior Ministry also reportedly has warned of a possible terrorist attack against the rally and has said it will not allow the protesters to enter South Waziristan. That could mean a potentially volatile standoff with thousands of determined demonstrators. Imran Khan has said that he expects up to 100,000 people to join him on the march.

Critics of drone attacks describe them as extra-judicial execution, and Khan has called them a crime against humanity. President Barack Obama reportedly personally approves the "kill list" of targeted militants. U.S. officials have insisted that civilian casualties from the attacks are few but only rarely have discussed the program publicly because it is supposedly secret.

The Pakistani Taliban's statement Friday singling out Khan described him as a "Westernized and secular personality" whose political party is guilty of "slavery" towards the West. Khan earned a reputation as a playboy during his cricket-playing years.

"Imran Khan's march is not to show solidarity with victims of drone strikes but to further his own political ends," said the statement, issued by Ehsan ullah Ehsan, the spokesman of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan.

The rejection from the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, an umbrella group for some of the most violent Taliban factions in Pakistan, comes despite the fact that Khan has tirelessly criticized the American presence in Afghanistan and the drone attacks and has advocated opening peace negotiations with Pakistan's Taliban.

NATIONAL NEWS

Jobless Rate Falls To 7.8%, Lowest Since January 2009

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Shaila Dewan

The nation's unemployment rate dropped below 8 percent in September to its lowest rate since the month President Obama took office, the Labor Department said Friday.

While employers added only a modest 114,000 jobs last month, the jobless rate declined to 7.8 percent from 8.1 percent, even though more people entered the labor force.

Adding to the positive news, job gains were revised upward by 40,000 for July (to 181,000) and by 46,000 for August (to 142,000), which had been considered a disappointing month, casting a slightly rosier hue on the summer slowdown.

The private sector, which has been adding jobs since March 2010, grew by 104,000 workers in September. Governments, where cuts have been a drag on the recovery, added 10,000 jobs.

Manufacturing, one of the bright spots that Mr. Obama has showcased throughout the re-election campaign, fell 16,000 jobs after losing a revised 22,000 in August, and construction jobs grew by 5,000. The number of temporary jobs, usually considered a harbinger of future growth, fell 2,000.

Coming a month before the presidential election, the jobs report offered ammunition for both sides as the candidates vie to convince voters that each is better equipped to steer the economy.

Mr. Obama can point to the 24th straight month of overall job growth after a severe financial crisis and a drop below the stubborn 8 percent jobless rate that has dogged his presidency. Republicans can — and did on Friday — continue to criticize the slow pace of improvement.

Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential challenger, took particular issue with any positive interpretation of the report.

"This is not what a real recovery looks like," he said in a statement. "We created fewer jobs in September than in August, and fewer jobs in August than in July, and we've lost over 600,000 manufacturing jobs since President Obama took office."

Representative Kevin Brady, a Republican from Texas and vice chairman of the joint economic

committee, said the drop in the unemployment rate "was driven primarily by an increase of 582,000 in the number of workers employed involuntarily in part-time jobs. These workers need and want full-time jobs."

"If not for all the people who have simply dropped out of the labor force," Mr. Romney said in his statement, "the real unemployment rate would be closer to 11 percent."

Representative Eric Cantor of Virginia, the majority leader, conceded that numbers were an improvement but added, "it simply isn't good enough." A jobless rate of 7.8 percent "should not be cause for celebration."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Democrat from Nevada, countered that "with unemployment dropping below 8 percent to the lowest level in four years, our economy is on the right track."

Consumers and businesses, too, seem to have divergent views of the economic situation. Consumers have shown increasing confidence as stocks rise and home prices stabilize.

Business leaders have been hanging back, though, more focused on global economic slowing and domestic concerns. They say they are uncertain what the election will mean for the business climate and are waiting in part for a resolution of the so-called fiscal cliff, a host of tax increases and budget cuts that will be triggered at the end of the year if Congress fails to act.

Harry Kazazian, the chief executive officer of Exxel Outdoors, a maker of camping equipment in Alabama, said the election, the fiscal cliff and rapidly shifting regulations had put him in a cautious mood.

With sales on the rise, Exxel has restarted a capital investment plan that it suspended three years ago, but is doing so slowly. "We're moving forward, but we're doing it in steps rather than being much more aggressive and putting ourselves out there," Mr. Kazazian said. "I wouldn't be surprised if things start turning the other way, meaning down."

But at a Walmart in Atlanta, shoppers were loosening the reins a bit, buying what they described as small indulgences like scented candle oil and seasonal beer.

Linda Avery, 50, a food service manager, said her income had not changed but her daughter had moved out of the house, reducing her food and utility expenses.

Michael Peacock, 43, said that although his house was in foreclosure, his chosen field, online marketing, was improving to the point where he could even turn down some jobs that were outside his specialty.

"I can see people shopping," Ms. Avery said, surveying the store. "You just feel like things are getting a little better."

The polling firm Gallup pinpointed September's rise in consumer confidence to the first day of the Democratic National Convention, and said it was almost entirely because of increased optimism among Democrats, while confidence among Republicans held steady at low levels. But Gallup could not say whether politics or improving economic conditions drove the change.

The discrepancy between consumers' mood and the outlook of companies can be easily explained, economists said. "Businesses are much more forward looking," said Ellen Zentner, the senior United States economist for Nomura Securities International.

Concerns over the fiscal cliff had begun showing up in business surveys in April, she said. "It's been weighing on their investment and hiring decisions for quite some time."

In a survey of 400 chief financial officers conducted this summer, Grant Thornton, a management consulting firm, found that many had shifted from neutrality to pessimism, with 45 percent of respondents saying they expected their work force to hold steady and 18 percent saying they expected it to shrink over the next six months. A large majority said they expected both health care costs and salaries to increase.

Stephen Chipman, the chief executive of Grant Thornton, said there appeared to be genuine growth in the technology, high-end manufacturing and energy sectors, while growth in health care was largely a result of consolidation and increased efficiency, and financial service hiring was largely driven by the need to comply with more regulations.

Before Mr. Obama took office, he pledged that his stimulus plan would keep unemployment from rising above 8 percent, based on projections that greatly underestimated the depth of the recession. Instead, unemployment has exceeded 8 percent since February 2009, peaking at 10 percent in October of that year.

There are now almost the same number of jobs as there were when Mr. Obama took office, but there are 426,000 more than when the economy

stopped hemorrhaging jobs in February 2010. A mere 62,000 increase in the number of jobs would allow Mr. Obama to claim a net increase in jobs over his tenure.

This year, the economy has added an average of 146,000 jobs a month. Economists say that job growth of 100,000 to 175,000 a month is essentially neutral in terms of its effect on the election, while anything higher would favor the incumbent.

The government's first estimate of September's payrolls, while eagerly awaited, is less than precise and will be revised in coming months as more data is collected and verified. In an annual recalibration last month, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that there were actually 400,000 more jobs added in the 12 months that ended in March than was previously thought. That benchmark will not be incorporated into the monthly jobs figures until early next year.

"The economy seems since the recovery began to have three gears," said Patrick O'Keefe, a labor economist and director of economic research at J. H. Cohn, an accounting firm, "slow, idle and reverse. It's stuck in slow. We don't have a gear faster than slow."

Unemployment Rate Falls To 7.8%

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Washington Post

By Neil Irwin, Nia-Malika Henderson

The job market is finally showing some juice.

The unemployment rate fell to 7.8 percent in September, the Labor Department said Friday, from 8.1 percent in July, its lowest since January 2009. It is a surprising show of improvement in a job market that had seemed listless in recent months. Unlike in August, the number improved for the right reasons: Not because people gave up looking for jobs, but because far more people reported having one.

Employers reported creating 114,000 jobs in September, almost identical to analysts' forecasts, but revisions to data from July and August brought improvement of that measure of the job market as well.

Add it up, and what had seemed to be a summer lull in employment increasingly appears not to have been much of a lull at all.

While it is that headline number — the drop in the unemployment rate — that will surely capture the most attention in the final weeks of a hard-fought presidential campaign, if anything the inner details

of the survey on which it is based reveal an even rosier picture.

The unemployment rate fell despite more people — 418,000 of them — entering the labor force. That brought the ratio of the American population with a job to its highest level since May 2010. Some 873,000 more Americans reported having jobs in the survey of households, and 456,000 fewer reported not having a job but wanting one.

It is important not to place too much weight on one report — although with its timing a month before the election, the September numbers tend to receive more attention than most. But altogether, the new numbers point to an economy that is not in as dire straits as it has seemed for much of the summer.

There has been some other evidence that consumers are feeling better about the state of the economy: The Conference Board's consumer confidence number rose to 70.3 in September from 61.3 in August, and the University of Michigan's consumer sentiment survey showed a similar rise. Combined with strong gains in the Labor Department's survey of households, that points to an improvement of conditions that ordinary Americans are seeing that is not visible in slower but more reliable data on production and output.

And indeed, that is reflected in the survey of employers on which the payrolls numbers are based. The 114,000 net new jobs reported by that survey — too few to bring the unemployment rate down over time — was dragged down in part by a 16,000 drop in manufacturing jobs, a sector that has been weak in recent months.

The timing is fortunate for President Obama's reelection prospects, with the most closely followed barometer of economic health, the unemployment rate, falling back to the level it was when he was inaugurated.

"While there is more work that remains to be done, today's employment report provides further evidence that the U.S. economy is continuing to heal from the wounds inflicted by the worst downturn since the Great Depression," Alan Krueger, chairman of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, said on the White House's blog.

Republicans emphasized that 7.8 percent joblessness remains high by any historical standard. Indeed, most economists believe that full employment would be something around 6 percent.

"This is not what a real recovery looks like," said Republican presidential challenger Mitt Romney in a statement released Friday morning by his campaign. "We created fewer jobs in September than in August, and fewer jobs in August than in July, and we've lost over 600,000 manufacturing jobs since President Obama took office. If not for all the people who have simply dropped out of the labor force, the real unemployment rate would be closer to 11%."

"While today's unemployment report offered some encouraging news, it simply isn't good enough," added Eric Cantor (R-Va.), the House Majority Leader, in a statement. "7.8% unemployment should not be cause for celebration."

Welch: "I Should Have Put A Question Mark" On Tweet

Friday, October 5, 2012

Politico

By Kevin Cirilli, Hadas Gold

Former General Electric CEO Jack Welch late Friday refused to back down from his tweeted accusation that the Obama administration "cooked" the Labor Department's jobs report, but admitted he should have added a "question mark" to the end of his tweet.

"I should have put a question mark on the end of that, let's face it," Welch said on CNN's Anderson Cooper 360.

Welch, a frequent critic of President Barack Obama, implied that the jobs numbers released Friday — notably the 7.8 percent unemployment rate — were tweaked to help the president's reelection campaign (a sentiment many conservatives have echoed).

"Unbelievable jobs numbers..these Chicago guys will do anything..can't debate so change numbers," Welch tweeted early Friday.

Welch said he questioned the "implausible" numbers as they were the "highest household employment numbers since 1983."

"Maybe their numbers were wrong before, maybe they're wrong now but I don't know. I am involved in this economy in a very deep way right now with lots of businesses. And this economy is not growing, I guarantee, you at 5 percent," Welch said.

When pushed by Cooper on whether he was directly accusing the Obama administration of rigging the numbers, Welch said he had "no evidence" and was "not accusing anybody of anything" but reasserted his belief that the

numbers in the report were not possible. "I'm not backing away, I'm not backing away from anything," he said.

In a testy exchange, Cooper asked Welch whether it was "irresponsible" to say "these Chicago guys will do anything" if Welch has "no facts."

"It's too important to not have a long discussion about how it's arrived and what the assumptions are," Welch answered.

Earlier Friday in a face-off with MSNBC's Chris Matthews, Welch also refused to back down.

"These numbers defy logic. They defy logic. We do not have a 4 to 5 percent booming economy," Welch told Matthews.

"This is an assertion that there was Jimmy-ing with the numbers, that there was corruption here, an infiltration or getting to — it's not funny, Jack," Matthews said. "You're talking about the president of the United States playing with the Bureau of Labor statistics number. This is Nixon stuff. This is what Nixon did back in the old days."

"Chris, don't lose it now," Welch said.

"I'm not losing it. Look at my face. I'm not losing it," Welch said.

"I can't see your face," Welch said.

"Do you want to take back the charge that there was corruption here?" Matthews said.

"No, I don't want to take back one word in that tweet," Welch said.

Welch, 76, also appeared on Fox News on Friday afternoon and said he wasn't "senile" — just asking tough questions.

"Those that don't like to agree with me say that I am old and senile but it is about asking questions. Does the economy feel like the employment has improved by 6 percent in the last 60 days?" Welch said on Fox.

He added: "You have ideologues in two areas of the government, in the EPA and in Labor, but we're supposed to assume that the Labor Department could be ideological, but the labor statistics aren't?"

CBO Tallies 2012 Deficit At \$1.1T

Friday, October 5, 2012

Associated Press

By Andrew Taylor

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new estimate puts the deficit for the just-completed 2012 budget year at

\$1.1 trillion, the fourth straight year of trillion dollar deficits on President Barack Obama's watch.

The result was a slight, \$207 billion improvement from the 2011 deficit of \$1.3 trillion.

The bleak figures from the Congressional Budget Office, while expected, add fodder for the heated presidential campaign, in which Obama's handling of the economy and the budget is a main topic. Friday's release came as the government announced that the unemployment rate dropped to 7.8 percent last month, matching the rate when Obama took office.

"President Obama once promised to cut the deficit in half by the end of his first term, but ... he's broken that promise, and has presided over his fourth straight trillion-dollar budget deficit," said GOP vice presidential nominee Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis. "The President's reckless spending habits have burdened the American people with another \$5.4 trillion in debt while failing to bring a real recovery for the 23 million Americans struggling for work or the 15 percent of Americans living in poverty."

The 2012 deficit was 7 percent of the size of the economy, an unsustainably high level. The figure is lower than the first three years of Obama's presidency, but higher than any other year since 1947.

The administration will release the official deficit numbers around mid-October, but they should line up closely with the CBO estimate, which showed that the government borrowed 31 cents for every dollar it spent.

The CBO estimate predicts a modest 3 percent increase over 2011 in both income tax and payroll tax receipts, reflecting the sluggish economic recovery. Corporate income tax receipts are way up — almost 34 percent — but most of that is a result of tax rules governing write-offs of business equipment.

Spending fell across a broad array of categories, the CBO said, but not Social Security and Medicare. Social Security payments rose by 6 percent, while Medicare grew by 3 percent, slightly less than in prior years.

Lower war costs meant a 3 percent decline in defense outlays, however, and the cost of unemployment benefits dropped 24 percent because fewer people have been receiving benefits recently. Medicaid costs dropped as well, because the federal government stopped paying a higher share of the program's costs.

Obama inherited an economy in recession and a deficit in excess of \$1 trillion. He promised to cut the deficit in half by the end of his first term, but deficits have instead remained at eye-popping levels, including a record \$1.4 trillion deficit in 2009 and deficits of \$1.3 trillion in each of the past two years.

In Wednesday night's debate, Obama said he has a budget plan to shave \$4 trillion from the deficit over the coming decade, but he counts \$1 trillion from savings already accomplished in budget deals with Republicans last year and \$848 billion from winding down wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney promises to balance the budget within eight to 10 years, but hasn't illustrated how he would do so. His budget claims are suspect as well since he promises to cut the overall budget by about \$500 billion in 2016 alone, while also promising to sharply boost military spending and restore more than \$700 billion in Democratic cuts to Medicare over the coming decade. Romney has ruled out increasing taxes.

Congress is looking toward addressing the deficit at the end of the year, but any such effort would actually increase the deficit since lawmakers promise to restore most or all of Bush-era tax cuts that are set to expire Dec. 31. Lawmakers also want to head off \$109 billion worth of automatic spending cuts set to hit the Pentagon and domestic programs in January. Republicans and Democrats disagree on whether part of the effort to replace this so-called sequester should include tax increases on upper-income earners.

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California Gas Prices May Hit Record

Pump prices soar in California after refinery outages and other problems. Some stations charge more than \$5 a gallon, others shut down. Some analysts hope the spike will be short-lived.

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Ronald D. White, Ricardo Lopez

California drivers are reeling from days of sharp gasoline price increases that left the state within reach of its record high. Economists warn that a prolonged period of elevated gas costs could harm consumers as the holiday shopping season kicks in.

Analysts attributed the price surge to fuel traders' emotional reaction after a series of refinery outages and other problems, including a Northern California refinery fire, a Southern California refinery blackout, pipeline contamination and other events. Some service stations were charging more than \$5 a gallon and others stopped buying new supplies out of fear that if the market turned they'd lose money.

"I haven't seen a series of incidents like this, and it has led to the worst panic-driven rise in gasoline prices that I have seen in 35 years," said Tom Kloza, chief oil analyst for the Oil Price Information Service.

Prices are likely to set records over the weekend, analysts said, but they held out hope that the pain could end soon as fuel production problems subside.

Unhappy motorists said they were caught off guard.

"I went to the Costco station in Pacoima to buy gas on Thursday and was shocked to find it closed," said Max Lang, 45, an engineer who lives in Stevenson Ranch. "I just don't get why it's happening."

Gwen Grace, a 37-year-old homemaker, searched Friday for a price cheaper than the \$4.39 a gallon that the USA gas station in Santa Monica was charging. Other nearby stations wanted as much as \$5.39, so she bought \$20 worth for her Prius and hoped it would last until prices begin to drop.

"It's just depressing," Grace said.

The average price of a gallon of regular gasoline Friday was \$4.486, up a record 17.1 cents from the day before, according to AAA's daily fuel price survey. That increase had followed an 8-cent rise from Wednesday to Thursday at a time when other parts of the country are watching prices decline.

"This is unprecedented," said Marie Montgomery, a spokeswoman for the Automobile Club of Southern California. "We hope this is a record that will never be broken."

California's average price was 31.5 cents a gallon higher than the next most expensive state, Alaska, according to AAA, which tracks prices from more than 100,000 U.S. retail outlets using credit-card receipts from the day before.

California's average gas price is getting close to the record high of \$4.61, set in 2008; but that price is the equivalent of \$4.93 in 2012 dollars,

according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' inflation calculator.

One economist describes a kind of domino effect driving price increases. Fuel buyers, concerned that the state's refinery problems would reduce supplies below adequate margins, overreacted even though gasoline supplies, as tracked by the California Energy Commission, are running just 2.5% below 2011 levels.

"Inventories may not be that low," said Philip K. Verleger Jr., visiting fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. "However, those owning supplies suddenly decide to keep them. Some might say hoard them. Buyers seeking gasoline supplies then bid up the price for the volumes that are available."

Wholesale gasoline traded as high as a record \$4.39 a gallon on Thursday. Add in about 65 cents in federal, state and local taxes and fees, and the implied retail price becomes \$5.04 a gallon, not including any profit margin for the gas station owner.

Economists said that the effect on consumers would depend on how high prices go and how long they stay there.

"People are not going to change spending habits right away," said Sung Won Sohn, an economist with Cal State Channel Islands in Camarillo. "But if [gas prices] remain where they are, people will cut back on spending elsewhere."

Esmael Adibi, a Chapman University economist, said that if high prices last a few weeks "the negative impacts should be minor."

"If it continues into the holiday shopping season," he said, "it will definitely have a negative impact on discretionary spending."

Analysts were split on how expensive gasoline was going to get.

Some noted the easing of wholesale prices Friday after Exxon Mobil Corp. said its Torrance refinery, which suffered a power outage Monday, had returned to operation.

Phil Flynn of the Price Futures Group in Chicago said he thought the state's record would be broken but not by much. "Once the refineries get back to normal, prices should begin to drop soon," he said.

Other analysts had grimmer predictions.

"Gasoline prices are going to skyrocket," said Chris Faulkner, an energy expert and chief

executive of Breitling Oil and Gas, a Dallas-based oil company.

"Service stations are shutting down, fearing that the market won't bear the price they would have to charge and that they will have to sell at a loss," he said. "In the next three days, if we don't see relief, we could be looking at \$5.70 gasoline and close to \$6."

Consumer advocates said that a lack of competition was to blame for high prices.

"When you've got such a small handful of owners controlling 14 refineries, it is inevitable that prices will go through the roof where there is friction in the delivery system," said Jamie Court, president of Consumer Watchdog.

"There are too few oil companies controlling too few refineries and they want too much in profits."

Loopholes Seen At Schools In Obama Get-Tough Policy

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Motoko Rich

With an agenda that Arne Duncan, the secretary of education, has described as a "quiet revolution," the Obama administration has pushed rigorous new standards for a majority of the nation's public schools as well as requirements that states and districts evaluate not just schools but individual teachers, in part by assessing their ability to improve student scores on standardized tests.

But some critics suggest that at the same time the administration has gotten tough on teachers and set higher standards, it could be allowing states to set new, unambitious goals for how quickly students must reach those standards, particularly poor and minority students.

"We repeatedly look for ways to game the system and fuzz up the fact that our kids aren't being educated to the standards that they need," said Amy Wilkins, vice president for government affairs at the Education Trust, a nonprofit group that works to close achievement gaps.

One particularly controversial example emerged over the summer, when Virginia initially released new targets showing that the state would require 57 percent of black students to become proficient in math by 2017, compared with 78 percent of white students. Virginia's education department has since revised its goals, with a goal of making 73 percent of all students proficient in math within five years.

The administration has pushed its agenda through two programs: its Race to the Top grants, which it has awarded to 19 states, and the waivers to 33 states from central provisions of the Bush administration's signature No Child Left Behind education law. States that have qualified for the waivers are relieved from meeting the law's most controversial target: making all students proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014.

Although both President Obama and Mitt Romney addressed education during their debate on Wednesday, neither talked specifically about the changes to No Child Left Behind. But Mr. Duncan, in a telephone interview, addressed critics of the waiver policies. He said the administration had deliberately flipped the theory behind No Child Left Behind, which has been up for reauthorization since 2007.

That law prescribed consequences for schools that failed to meet annual goals, while allowing individual states to set goals that Mr. Duncan described as "dummied-down standards." He said that with its waivers, which the administration used to sidestep Congress after lawmakers failed repeatedly to reauthorize the No Child law, the policy was "tight on goals, loose on means."

So while the administration is requiring states that want waivers to set rigorous "college and career ready" standards, it is allowing them to design their own proposals for how — and how quickly — to get schools to meet those standards. "Going forward, we should be in the business of supporting states and holding them accountable," Mr. Duncan said, "and not treating every state and district the same."

Some advocacy groups worry that the waivers require few consequences if schools fail to meet their new targets, even as No Child Left Behind was criticized for requiring rigid interventions for low-performing schools, like forcing states to lay off a large portion of a school's staff or to close a school altogether.

The waivers allow states to design new interventions, and some critics worry that education officials now have too much leeway. "All of these states continue to significantly weaken the power and impact of goals by not using them to hold schools accountable," Jeremy Ayers, associate director of federal education programs at the left-leaning Center for American Progress, wrote in an e-mail.

With the waivers directing states to focus on the bottom 15 percent of schools, Mr. Ayers said, he was concerned that the remaining schools would

do little more than report test results. "Describing the problem is not the same as fixing it," he said.

Teachers' unions and other education advocates have chafed at other conditions in the waivers and Race to the Top, which require new teacher evaluation systems that rely increasingly on students' standardized test performance. Such objections became a significant sticking point in the Chicago teachers' union strike last month.

According to the Education Commission of the States, 30 states have passed laws requiring districts to evaluate teachers using standardized test scores. Michael Griffith, senior policy analyst at the commission, said states had acted despite the fact that the \$4.35 billion disbursed through the Race to the Top program is to be spread over five years and amounts to less than 1 percent of total education spending at the federal, state and local level in 2011-2012. Federal education financing is typically about 10 percent of total spending on public K-12 education.

It is not clear what could happen to the waivers if Mr. Romney is elected president. Congressional Democrats and Republicans have repeatedly failed to reauthorize the elementary and secondary education law as they have clashed on the proper role for the federal government in public schools. In the debate, Mr. Romney reiterated his support for a plan to distribute federal money so students can choose where they go to school, and surprised some educators and analysts when he said: "I'm not going to cut education funding. I don't have any plan to cut education funding."

Supporters of the Obama administration's approach say it is allowing states to accommodate differences between students, rather than entrapping schools with unattainable goals.

"A statement by a state that 'we're going to give low-income schools more time to reach proficiency than we're going to give high-income schools' is reasonable in the real world," said Chester E. Finn Jr., president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a conservative-leaning education policy group in Washington. The adoption of the new college and career standards, he said, "is still ambitious, and says in the long run, it's the same standard we'd like them all to attain."

Civil rights groups said they would monitor states to make sure they were not watering down expectations for minority groups or poor students.

"Ultimately, fiddling around with the finish line or different heights of the hurdles is not how you get all students to succeed," said Beth Glenn,

education director at the N.A.A.C.P. "You have to change what you do in the classroom."

Teachers worry that they are being asked to do too much at a time when money is so limited.

"You can continue to say you're accountable for x, y and z," said Freeda Pirillis, a first-grade teacher at Agassiz Elementary School in Chicago. "But if you don't support teachers and students in that work, then that's just an empty sort of thing." She noted, for example, that "we continue to have textbooks in our school that show that Bill Clinton was our last president."

Education officials say they feel the effect of the Obama administration's education agenda in their day-to-day lives.

"When you think about the impact of the federal government on our work, it's amazing," said David Fleishman, superintendent of the Newton Public Schools in Massachusetts. Every faculty meeting since the beginning of the school year, he said, has focused on the teacher evaluation system the district has introduced to meet federal criteria.

"I'm just hopeful and optimistic that it ends up improving student learning," Mr. Fleishman said, "and not being a bureaucratic checklist."

Worries Over Defense Department Money For "Hackerspaces"

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Amy O'Leary

This fall, 16 high schools in California started experimental workshops, billed as a kind of "shop class for the 21st century," that were financed by the federal government. And over the next three years, the \$10 million program plans to expand to 1,000 high schools, modeled on the growing phenomenon of "hackerspaces" — community clubhouses where hackers gather to build, invent or take things apart in their spare time.

But the money has stirred some controversy. The financing for the schools program is one of several recent grants that the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or Darpa, has made to build closer ties to hackers.

Unlike the hackers who cripple Web sites and steal data, the people the government is working with are more often computer professionals who indulge their curiosity at their local hackerspace. But the financing has prompted criticism that the military's money could co-opt these workshops just as they are starting to spread quickly.

There are about 200 hackerspaces in the United States, a sharp jump from the handful that existed five years ago. The workshops, with names like the Hacktory, Jigsaw Renaissance and Hacker Dojo, have incubated successful businesses like Pinterest, the social networking site, and are seen as hotbeds for recruiting engineers and computer scientists.

"Magic comes from these places," said Peiter Zatko, a program manager at Darpa, who is reaching out to these workshops, looking for cutting-edge ideas in cybersecurity. His program has entered into 74 contracts, and about 40 projects have been completed, work that he said would have been stymied by traditional government bureaucracy. (Mr. Zatko made a name for himself as a respected hacker before joining the government — he testified before a Senate committee in 1998, using the pseudonym Mudge, and told the panel that he could take down the Internet in 30 minutes.)

When his government colleagues see the results of his program, "their jaws just drop," Mr. Zatko said.

Many people say that hackerspaces are promising incubators for innovation and should be cultivated. However, not everyone agrees that the Defense Department should be playing a role, especially in high school programs.

"Having these programs in schools is fantastic, but the military calling the shots in American education?" Mitch Altman, a co-founder of Noisebridge, a San Francisco hackerspace, said in an interview. "I don't see that as a positive move," added Mr. Altman, who, in an online post, was among the first to take a stand against the program.

The controversy over the government programs led to a tense session in a packed ballroom at the Hackers on Planet Earth conference this summer in New York, where recipients and critics of the Darpa financing gathered to discuss its implications.

"If you grow a piece of celery in red water, it's going to be red," said Sean Auriti, who is known as Psytek at the hackerspace Alpha One Labs in Brooklyn, which he runs. "I'm just wondering how this Darpa defense contract money is going to influence these projects."

And yet Mr. Auriti himself is benefiting from the Darpa money as a member of SpaceGambit, a consortium of hackerspaces that won a \$500,000 grant for research in space exploration and

colonization technologies. He said he hoped that the grant would help him build a mini-thruster to launch backpack-size satellites into orbit.

But the debate over the financing has prompted him to establish a separate working group for the space research with Darpa. That way, none of his workshop's members will feel as though they are unwillingly participating in government work, he said.

Some on the conference panel voiced concerns that Darpa financing would steer more hackers toward military projects. Mr. Altman, the Noisebridge co-founder, said he viewed the influence of military money as a threat because it would lead hackers to choose projects that might appeal to grant makers, as opposed to following their passions, however idiosyncratic.

Everyone on the panel agreed that hackerspaces could provide an exciting model for hands-on technical education in schools, and Dale Dougherty, the founder of Maker Media, which caters to the do-it-yourself movement, said he believed that the high school program that his company was managing would do just that.

"I think we're looking at science and technology as content, not experiences," Mr. Dougherty said. "We're asking kids, 'Do you want to be an engineer?' and they don't know what that means. But if you ask them, 'What do you want to make?' they start thinking about doing something."

Darpa's Web site describes the program's goal as encouraging students to "jointly design and build systems of moderate complexity, such as mobile robots, go-carts, etc., in response to prize challenges."

But Mr. Dougherty said that the fears about his program were unfounded, and that he wanted the students to work on projects of their choosing.

"We're not asking kids to build weapons," he said.

Darpa has a storied history of making long-shot bets and hoping that a handful of them will pay off. It financed the development of technologies that led to the creation of the Internet, GPS and stealth technology. This cluster of bets on low-cost, innovative manufacturing is part of a strategy by Darpa officials to reduce development times in a range of projects like armored vehicle construction and cybersecurity fixes.

When Lt. Col. Nathan Wiedenman, a Darpa program manager, appeared in Army fatigues this May at a San Francisco-area do-it-yourself festival, Maker Faire, he said the agency's mission

was to ensure that the United States would never again be surprised by the technical superiority of an enemy state, as it was when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik.

"To push the bounds of new technology, we have to physically make things," he said.

Colonel Wiedenman is managing both the grant for the high school program and a \$3.5 million grant to the retail start-up TechShop (it is a bit like a Kinko's, but instead of copiers, members pay to use laser cutters). As part of that contract, Darpa employees will have access to TechShop's tools after midnight, when the doors are closed to the public, since Darpa has no lab space of its own.

Matt Joyce, an early hackerspace member who has worked with NASA and has publicly voiced support for Darpa financing, said he believed that the agency's interest in hackerspaces was a sign of their growing importance. But he acknowledged that the government financing would continue to provoke debate, because questions about ethics often loom large for engineers, even in cases in which the government allows them to retain commercial rights to their inventions.

"You never know when you build something where it might end up," he said. "I think there's a lot of folks getting the Darpa funding, and a lot of people watching on the sidelines to see what happens."

POLITICAL NEWS

Race Tightening, But Obama's Still In The Lead

The debate shook things up, giving Romney new hope. But Obama's lackluster performance has been overshadowed by the positive jobs report, handing him a boost.

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Paul West

WASHINGTON — A large drop in the nation's jobless rate gave President Obama an unexpected boost Friday in his increasingly competitive contest with Republican challenger Mitt Romney.

The decline to 7.8% brought the unemployment rate below 8% for the first time since the first full month of Obama's presidency and cheered the president's partisans. Based on the reactions to past reports, it's unlikely to change voters' overall sense of how the country is doing economically.

Still, the announcement did have one big benefit for Obama: shifting attention away from his lackluster performance in the first presidential debate less than 36 hours earlier. The debate shook up the campaign, giving Romney new hope just when the race seemed to be quickly slipping away from him.

Combining both events — the debate and the jobs report — strategists in both parties expect to see the race tighten but also say the Democratic incumbent remains the front-runner. Obama has more options to reach the required 270 electoral votes, and Romney still faces a more difficult path.

For Romney, "it's not as steep of an uphill fight going forward. It's still uphill," said Dan Schnur, a former Republican campaign consultant who directs the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at USC.

For months, Obama has benefited from a slowly recovering economy. The stock market is up and housing prices are rising. Those changes have contributed to increasing confidence about the economy and the general state of the country, according to voter polls and other measures of consumer confidence.

Now the jobs numbers have added to that picture. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the U.S. economy produced a seasonally adjusted net increase of 114,000 jobs in September. In addition, the agency reported that job creation in July and August had been better than previously estimated.

Obama greeted the news by boasting that joblessness had "fallen to its lowest level since [he] took office."

"Today, I believe that as a nation, we are moving forward again," he said to applause from supporters at a rally in northern Virginia.

But Romney dismissed the sluggish pace of improvement, saying it is "not what a real recovery" looks like.

"We can do better," he told an Abingdon, Va., crowd.

Romney's partisans have been greatly encouraged by his debate performance, but the Republican faces the challenge of changing the minds of voters at a stage of the campaign when the vast majority already have their preferences firmly set.

Ohio, in particular, remains a stubborn obstacle. Romney trails by a significant margin there, though the campaigns disagree on exactly how much.

"Obama's definitely ahead, [but] Ohio is not out of reach for Romney. He's certainly got enough time and money to catch up," said John Green, who directs the University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics. He added that it was "entirely possible" that the latest news on jobs could cancel out some or all of Romney's debate boost, "leaving the race where it has been."

Without Ohio, Romney would probably need all of the remaining tossup states in order to win.

Pre-debate polls showed him gaining in Virginia and Florida, key battlegrounds where he is spending the first five days after Wednesday's debate. He also would have to carry the swing states of Nevada, Colorado, North Carolina and Iowa (creating an unlikely 269-269 electoral-vote tie, which Romney would be favored to win in the House of Representatives).

Given Obama's control over electoral bounties like California and New York, the president starts off with a higher number of guaranteed votes. He would need only Ohio and any one of those other six tossup states to gain reelection.

Democrats are girding for poll shifts in coming days that will show the presidential race tied nationally or Romney ahead by a point or two, though a truer test of where the race stands will be the next round of surveys in the battleground states.

Other incumbent presidents have recovered after blowing the first debate of their reelection campaigns, and Obama's supporters are nervously watching for their man to bounce back in the second debate, on Oct. 16.

If Obama falters again, panic will probably set in. "I don't know where we are if he has another bad debate," said Democratic strategist Bill Carrick.

Romney's strong showing in the first debate could help him accomplish what even his own campaign advisors said he had failed to do earlier: close the sale with voters who don't want to give Obama another term. But with relatively few voters truly undecided, Romney also has to convert soft Obama supporters, a much tougher task.

"Go out and knock on doors and get people who voted for President Obama to see the light and come join our team," he urged a conservative gathering in Denver on Thursday.

At the very least, the debate has squelched talk about Republican campaign money shifting to more winnable House and Senate contests.

"If Romney needs anything, he needs more time," said Craig Robinson, a former political director of the Republican Party in Iowa, where Romney plans to campaign Tuesday. "He's behind and he needs to catch up."

With Nov. 6 just a month away, any day that Obama gets good headlines, as was the case Friday, hurts Romney's efforts to gain ground. And the better economic news makes it more imperative for him to score points on other topics. On Monday, Romney will try to do just that, by delivering a major address on foreign policy, an issue that his advisors think he can turn to his advantage amid continued unrest in the Middle East.

Obama Hits Romney On Women's Issues In Virginia

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Washington Post

By David Nakamura, Rosalind S. Helderman

President Obama and Republican Mitt Romney delivered dueling speeches in Virginia on Friday, with the president attacking his rival on women's health issues and the GOP nominee focusing on energy policy.

Obama used his appearance at George Mason University in Fairfax to hail the news that the economy added 114,000 jobs in September and the jobless rate had fallen to 7.8 percent, the lowest since the president took office.

And as he did Thursday on the campaign trail, Obama again mocked Romney's comment, during their debate Wednesday in Denver, that he would eliminate federal funding to PBS even though he likes Big Bird, as a way to help curb the deficit.

"Governor Romney plans to let Wall Street run wild again, but he's going to bring down the hammer on 'Sesame Street,'" Obama joked. "It makes perfect sense."

Romney swooped into Southwest Virginia's coal country to rail against Obama's energy policies, saying the White House has stood in the way of coal development. After meeting privately with miners who were recently laid off, Romney told more than 3,000 supporters in Abingdon, Va., that the country could create up to 4 million jobs if it gets serious about developing energy.

"I know right now you're thinking about one job: your job," Romney said. "I'm thinking of your job as well, person by person. Every American deserves a good job. People are hard-working right here in this community. I want to make sure

your jobs stay here, grow here and provide a bright future for you and for your family."

The candidates' appearances in Virginia on the same day underscored the importance of the swing state's 13 electoral votes in the election. Though polls have shown Obama holding a lead, Romney is hoping his strong debate performance this week will help buoy his chances.

In his speech, the president lit into Romney on women's health issues, an area where the Obama campaign believes it has gained a significant advantage. Polls show the president with a healthy lead among women voters nationally, an edge that has helped boost him to a lead in swing states, including Virginia, where Obama leads Romney by 19 points among women.

Obama warned that Romney's health-care policies would return women to the 1950s by limiting their ability to access contraception, get an abortion and purchase insurance that covers breast cancer.

In Virginia, state GOP lawmakers gained national attention this year after proposing legislation that would have required that most women seeking an abortion undergo a transvaginal ultrasound, a concept lampooned by liberal TV commentators and even "Saturday Night Live." Amid the uproar, Gov. Robert F. McDonnell had the bill amended to specify a less invasive method, but Democrats have continued to try to capitalize politically on the controversy.

"The decisions that affect a woman's health are not up to politicians, they're not up to insurance companies, they're up to you," Obama said. "You deserve a president who will fight to keep it that way."

Later Friday, Obama pressed his critique of Romney's debate performance to a crowd of 9,000 poncho-clad students and enthusiastic supporters in a driving rain at Cleveland State University. He also stopped at a local market to pick up some pumpkin and zucchini breads and beef jerky.

Enormous letters erected above bleachers on the football field where Obama spoke spelled out "V-O-T-E E-A-R-L-Y."

"Before I begin, Ohio, I have just one question," Obama opened his remarks. "Are you registered to vote?"

President Barack Obama Returns To Battleground Ohio As New Dynamics Shape Race For White House
Saturday, October 6, 2012
Cleveland Plain Dealer

By Henry J. Gomez

CLEVELAND, Ohio — College campus? Check.

A call to vote early? Of course.

Ohio? Where else?

But the dynamics were unmistakably different Friday as President Barack Obama returned to this electoral battleground. Armed with fresh jobs numbers that showed national unemployment at its lowest since he took office, Obama played offense and defense while speaking to 9,000 rain-soaked supporters on Cleveland State University's soccer field.

With a swagger that eluded him two days earlier in his first debate with Republican challenger Mitt Romney, the president landed belated blows while arguing that his stewardship has the country inching toward full economic recovery.

"Now, every month we understand, especially here in Cleveland and all around Ohio, that there are too many friends and neighbors who are still looking for work, too many families who are still struggling to pay the bills," the Democratic incumbent said in his 20-minute campaign speech. "And they were struggling even before this recession hit."

"But today's news should give us some encouragement. It shouldn't be an excuse for the other side to try to talk down the economy just to score a few political points. It's a reminder that this country has come too far to turn back now."

Earlier Friday, the U.S. Labor Department reported that the national unemployment rate dropped to 7.8 percent in September. The jobless level has not been below 8 percent since January 2009, when Obama began his first term.

Romney cited revised unemployment data for July and August and disputed any notion of progress.

"This is not what a real recovery looks like," the former Massachusetts governor said in a statement released by his campaign before Obama's Cleveland rally. "We created fewer jobs in September than in August, and fewer jobs in August than in July, and we've lost over 600,000 manufacturing jobs since President Obama took office. If not for all the people who have simply dropped out of the labor force, the real unemployment rate would be closer to 11 percent."

The CSU visit was Obama's 14th to Ohio this year. He held college-campus rallies last week at Bowling Green State University and Kent State

University and will return Tuesday for a rally at Ohio State University in Columbus.

As he did in Kent last week, Obama on Friday urged supporters to cast ballots before the Nov. 6 election. Early voting by mail and in person at county boards of elections began this week. And as he often does on the campaign trail, Obama responded with a call to action when the crowd jeered at the mention of Romney's name: "Don't boo — vote."

Obama showed little of that fire Wednesday night while debating Romney in Denver. Many scored it a victory for Romney, who consistently trailed Obama in Ohio polls leading up to the showdown. The president has spent the days since trying to reassert himself in toss-up states, none more valuable than the Buckeye State, which awards 18 electoral votes.

At CSU, the mark left by Romney's performance was apparent in Obama's refashioned stump speech.

"My opponent, he was doing a lot of — a little tap dance at the debate the other night, trying to wiggle out of stuff he's been saying for a year ... it was like 'Dancing with the Stars,' " Obama said. "Or maybe it was 'Extreme Makeover — debate edition.' But no matter what he says, my opponent, he's a big believer of these top-down economics."

Obama questioned the math of Romney's proposed tax cuts, wondering how they could work without "blowing up the deficit" or hurting middle-class families. Addressing Romney's pledge Wednesday night to end federal funding for public broadcasting, he also offered pointed sarcasm that eluded him in the debate but since has become a staple in his remarks.

"Somebody is finally getting tough on Big Bird," Obama said. "Elmo, you better make a run for it. Gov. Romney is going to let Wall Street run wild again, but he's going to bring the hammer down on 'Sesame Street.' "

The rain — cold and consistent from the time Air Force One landed at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport until Obama departed four hours later — seemed not to bother his audience. Many wore rain ponchos, but some stood without cover, their casual clothes or business suits drenched while they waited hours for Obama's 2:30 p.m. speech to begin.

Michelle Finney-Kofron, of Lakewood, and her 28-year-old son, Gabe, arrived at 10:30 a.m.

"It's just a little rain, but it was worth it. We're still smiling," she said.

James Woody, a retired union worker who met Obama before the president took the stage, "didn't even notice the rain. It was the opportunity of a lifetime." He said he is tired of partisan bickering and hopes Obama can unify the nation.

"It has taken a toll on all of us," Woody said.

Obama acknowledged the dreary weather when urging the crowd to "step up" and help re-elect him.

"And I know I'm preaching to the choir here because you all are standing in the rain," Obama said as his supporters clapped. "But a little rain never hurt anybody. Some of these policies from the other side could hurt a whole lot of folks.

"So we've only got just a little over a month left, and you can start voting right now. And the way we're going to do it is reminding ourselves that the only way this country makes progress is when we do it together --black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, young, old, rich, poor, abled and disabled. All of us together have to do this."

Romney Energizes Supporters During Event In Coal Country

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Roanoke (VA) Times

By Mason Adams

ABINGDON — Mitt Romney was in the southwest part of this battleground state Friday, trying to maximize campaign momentum from his Wednesday debate against President Barack Obama.

Romney rallied supporters at Carter Machinery, the same company he visited in Salem in June.

While standing in coal country, the Republican rapped Obama for policies he said have damaged the coal industry — while downplaying a reported drop in unemployment to below 8 percent for the first time since 2009.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the economy added 114,000 jobs last month, and the unemployment rate fell to 7.8 percent. Speaking to a crowd of more than 4,000, Romney said that's fewer jobs than were created the month before, and he argued the unemployment rate figure has fallen only because of the way that statistic is measured and not because of any meaningful job growth.

"The reason it's come down this year is primarily due to the fact that more and more people have

just stopped looking for work," Romney said. "The truth is, if the same share of people were participating in the work force today as on the day the president got elected, why, our unemployment rate would be about 11 percent."

But, Romney said, if he's elected he'll create 12 million jobs. He offered a series of proposals to get there, including cutting federal spending largely by shifting programs to states, cutting taxes and using more of the country's energy resources.

Much of the staging for the campaign event was built around the last of those three proposals. As with his appearance at Carter Machinery's Salem headquarters in June, Romney delivered his speech in front of a large American flag and an array of yellow Caterpillar machines. A banner behind him read, "Coal Country Stands with Mitt."

Carter Machinery provides Caterpillar equipment for coal mines in Virginia and West Virginia and employs about 1,300 people at 23 locations.

Romney was introduced by Kevin Crutchfield, the CEO of Alpha Natural Resources, a Bristol-based coal company that announced last month it was idling eight mines, including Guest Mountain deep mines No. 8 and No. 9 in Wise County, and the Twin Star surface mine in Buchanan County.

Crutchfield said Romney understands what it takes to create jobs — "and it's not suffocating regulations."

"When the president was running for office, he said if you built a new coal-fired plant, why, you'd go bankrupt," Romney said. "And the head of the new EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] has also said the regulations on burning coal are now so stringent it's virtually impossible to build a new coal-fired plant."

Romney said he would take a different approach.

"I don't believe in putting our coal under the ground forever," Romney said. "I believe we should take advantage of it, put American workers back to work and use a resource that's abundant and cheap and can be burned in a clean way. And by the way, I also believe in oil and gas. I believe we should develop our resources."

Romney said that developing North America's various energy sources would make the continent energy independent, keep the price of gasoline and electricity "moderated" and create up to 4 million jobs.

Outside the event, Bristol Commissioner of the Revenue Terry Frye, a Democrat, argued that the

coal industry has shed jobs for reasons other than federal regulations.

"The reason the coal industry is down is because of the low cost of natural gas," Frye said. "Natural gas is a competing fuel with coal. It is at an all-time low, and quite frankly it doesn't have the bad environmental byproducts that coal does. EPA regulations are primarily designed for the health and safety of miners and the health and safety of citizens that live around coal-generated plants."

U.S. Rep. Morgan Griffith, R-Salem, who represents both Abingdon and Virginia's coal-producing counties in the 9th Congressional District, spoke at the rally ahead of Romney. Griffith argued that Southwest Virginia could turn the presidential race in the state and perhaps nationally, but only if its Republican voters come out in force. Four years ago Obama fared more poorly in the 9th District than anywhere else in Virginia, but the district's turnout was only 67 percent — the lowest in the state.

Romney noted that Southwest Virginia is going through "tough times" but he promised an economic revival if he's elected.

"I know right now you're thinking about one job: Your job," Romney said. "And I'm thinking about your job as well."

Romney drew some of his biggest cheers when he referenced his Wednesday debate against Obama, which many observers believe that Romney won decisively. Democrats also referenced the debate — particularly Romney's remark about Big Bird in a comment about how he would cut the federal subsidy to PBS — in protests outside the event. One protester dressed as Big Bird carried a sign reading "Crack down on Wall Street not Sesame Street," while the advocacy group MoveOn.org paid for a plane to fly a sign that read "Mitt Lies, Big Bird Dies."

Friday's Abingdon stop is one of a series of Romney appearances in Western Virginia. He was in Augusta County earlier this week, and Romney is scheduled to deliver a foreign policy speech Monday at Virginia Military Institute in Lexington.

Newly Confident Romney Rallies Thousands In St. Petersburg
Saturday, October 6, 2012
Tampa Bay (FL) Times
By Katie Sanders

ST. PETERSBURG — A newly confident Mitt Romney returned to Florida on Friday and picked up where he left off at the first presidential

debate, attacking President Barack Obama on taxes, spending and regulation.

"I enjoyed that debate a couple of nights ago," Romney said as the crowd of about 6,000 people drowned him out with laughs and applause. "That was a great experience."

He spoke for 19 minutes before a backdrop of a setting sun over Tampa Bay, making the case that the sitting president has failed to keep his promises and is ill-equipped to solve the nation's economic maladies. The words on a rug under Romney's feet as he spoke: "Florida victory."

"I will not raise taxes on small business, and I will not raise taxes on middle-income families," said Romney, who was accompanied by his wife, Ann.

Romney delivered his remarks from a platform surrounded by supporters — some of whom waved blue foam baseball gloves with "Mitt" in the middle — at Pier Park in downtown St. Petersburg.

They broke out into chants of "Romney, Romney" and cheered as the former Massachusetts governor promised to champion small businesses and reduce the nation's \$16 trillion debt. Romney also ridiculed Obama's spending on green energy jobs.

"He got a chance to explain his jobs program, how he's going to create new jobs in America," Romney said. "Did you hear what he had to say? I didn't either."

A dozen or so people and, yes, two men dressed as Big Bird protested the evening rally, focusing on Romney's proclamation that he would cut federal funding for the Public Broadcasting Service.

The group held mock boxing matches between an oversized Romney puppet and the famous yellow bird in front of the winding line of Romney supporters, some of whom laughed at the stunt. One bout ended with the man inside the Romney costume placing his foot atop one bird's chest and declaring victory.

Adding to the anti-Romney imagery: an activist flaunting an oversized Etch A Sketch and a skeleton sprawled on a hospital bed, meant to symbolize Romney's Medicare plan.

Romney used St. Petersburg to launch a three-day tour of Florida. Today, he'll campaign near Orlando; on Sunday, Port St. Lucie.

It's no surprise Romney is spending the weekend in the state, nor that Obama will return to Florida next week. A RealClearPolitics average of polls

shows the state in a dead heat, with each candidate averaging 47 percent of the vote.

"Florida is a very important state," said St. Petersburg resident Tiffany Jones, 33, to her daughter Ava, 6, before Romney spoke. "Very important."

While Obama can lose Florida and still be re-elected, Romney almost certainly needs Florida's 29 electoral votes. A loss here would mean Romney would likely need to run the table in eight other swing states — Nevada, Colorado, Iowa, Wisconsin, Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina and New Hampshire — in order to be elected Nov. 6. Polls show Romney trails in all of those states except North Carolina.

Romney's debate victory could help flip the script.

"I was so thrilled at the debate, for people to see my husband unfiltered, without any negative ads, without any media trying to interpret what he says and what he feels in his heart," Ann Romney told the crowd. "This is a man who cares about the American people."

Supporters agreed, saying he revived his base.

"He was wonderful," said Nancy Davis, a 77-year-old retired teacher and social worker. "That really energized all of us. I think it shows that he's up on all his issues, and he's much more qualified to be president than Obama."

Romney did not mention that the unemployment dipped below 8 percent Friday, a figure that had become a hallmark of Romney stump speeches.

Romney "doesn't want to acknowledge how businesses have added 5.2 million jobs over the past two and a half years, and that the unemployment rate is now at its lowest level since January 2009," Obama campaign spokeswoman Lis Smith said. "Nor does he want to tell the truth about how he'd bring back the same policies that got us into the mess in the first place. Americans want to move forward, not back."

A slew of local lawmakers including Pinellas County's two Republican congressmen, Gus Billrakis and C.W. Bill Young, helped introduce Romney, along with former St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Baker, former Tampa Mayor Dick Greco, a Democrat, and Alabama U.S. Rep. Artur Davis, a Democrat-turned-Republican. Not at Friday night's rally: Gov. Rick Scott. Scott has yet to campaign with Romney in the state.

"For God's sakes, please vote," Greco said. "And please vote for Mitt Romney."

Romney Claims Of Bipartisanship As Governor Face Challenge

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Michael Wines

BOSTON — He came into office with a mandate to shake things up, an agenda laden with civics-book reforms and a raging fiscal crisis that threatened to torpedo both. He sparred with a hostile legislature and suffered a humiliating setback in the midterm elections. As four years drew to a close, his legacy was blotted by anemic job growth, sagging political popularity and — except for a landmark health care overhaul bill — a record of accomplishment that disappointed many.

That could be the Barack Obama that Mitt Romney depicted in Wednesday's presidential debate as an ineffective and overly partisan leader. But it could also be Mitt Romney, who boasted of a stellar record as Massachusetts governor, running a state dominated by the political opposition.

Mr. Romney did score some successes beyond his health care legislation, notably joining a Democratic legislature to cut a deficit-ridden budget by \$1.6 billion and revamping a troubled school building fund. Some outside experts and former aides say his administration excelled at the sorts of nuts-and-bolts efficiencies that make bureaucracies run better, like streamlining permit approvals and modernizing jobs programs.

As a Republican governor whose legislature was 87 percent Democratic, Mr. Romney said in Wednesday's debate, "I figured out from Day 1 I had to get along, and I had to work across the aisle to get anything done." The result, he said, was that "we drove our schools to be No. 1 in the nation. We cut taxes 19 times."

But on closer examination, the record as governor he alluded to looks considerably less burnished than Mr. Romney suggested. Bipartisanship was in short supply; Statehouse Democrats complained he variously ignored, insulted or opposed them, with intermittent charm offensives. He vetoed scores of legislative initiatives and excised budget line items a remarkable 844 times, according to the nonpartisan research group Factcheck.org. Lawmakers reciprocated by quickly overriding the vast bulk of them.

The big-ticket items that Mr. Romney proposed when he entered office in January 2003 went largely unrealized, and some that were achieved turned out to have a comparatively minor impact. A wholesale restructuring of state government

was dead on arrival in the legislature; an ambitious overhaul of the state university system was stillborn; a consolidation of transportation fiefs never took place.

Mr. Romney lobbied successfully to block changes in the state's much-admired charter school program, but his own education reforms went mostly unrealized. His promise to lure new business and create jobs in a state that had been staggered by the collapse of the 2000 dot-com boom never quite bore fruit; unemployment dropped less than a percentage point during his four years, but for most of that time, much of the decline was attributed to the fact that any new jobs were being absorbed by a shrinking work force.

Mr. Romney won lawmakers' consent to streamline a tangled health and human services bureaucracy, but the savings amounted to but \$7 million a year. He entered office considering an eight-state compact to battle climate change, but left office outside the consortium, saying it cost too much.

"He put on the table in his inaugural address, and then in his budget, a series of proposed reforms like civil service reform, pension reform — going right to the heart of the lion's den," Michael Widmer, president of the nonpartisan Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, said in an interview. But excepting health care, "he never followed up. There was a handful of successes, but there was never a full-blown or focused program in the sense of saying, 'Here's our vision.'"

Mr. Romney's former aides vigorously disagree.

"That's an overwrought type of critique," said Timothy Murphy, the health and human services secretary under Mr. Romney. "If you take a look at the things the governor set out to do, we accomplished a lot. The budgets were more than balanced — we generated surpluses."

And, he said, "We did pass the most consequential piece of health care legislation in this state in 25 years."

Mr. Romney was pushing on an open door on the 2006 initiative — Democrats had long dreamed of providing health coverage to almost every resident.

Jane Edmonds, who headed the state's Labor and Workforce Development agency, recounted a meeting at the start of Mr. Romney's term in which he handed out a list of campaign promises to his staff and ordered them carried out within four years.

"My opinion is that he delivered on almost all those promises," she said. "We had 8 or 10 of them and we carried them all out."

Some of Mr. Romney's harshest critics concede his competence and his grasp of Massachusetts' problems and needs. Many of the initiatives he took into office were arguably nonpartisan; he brought to the job the same gimlet-eyed scrutiny of costs and revenues that he employed as an investment manager to spot potentially profitable companies.

But in contrast to his statements in the debate, many say, Mr. Romney neither mastered the art of reaching across the aisle nor achieved unusual success as governor. To the contrary, they say, his relations with Democrats could be acrimonious, and his ability to get big things done could be just as shackled as is President Obama's ability to push his agenda through a hostile House of Representatives.

Mr. Romney could be appealing and persuasive, they say. But he also could display a certain political tone-deafness and a failure to nurture the constituencies he needed to make his initiatives succeed.

Mr. Romney promoted his record on Wednesday as a bipartisan leader by noting that he met regularly with the Democratic leadership of the Massachusetts legislature. But that apparently was not enough to keep afloat a relationship that had been rancorous from the beginning.

In the opening months of his tenure, Mr. Romney vetoed a House plan to create new committees and raise legislative pay, and the legislators rejected his flagship proposal, a nearly 600-page plan to overhaul the state bureaucracy. "They had a deteriorating relationship during the first two years," said Jeffrey Berry, a political science professor and expert on state politics at Tufts University.

Mr. Romney proved to have a taste for vetoes, killing legislative initiatives in his first two years at more than twice the rate of his more popular Republican predecessor, William F. Weld. The Boston Globe reported in 2004.

Some seemed almost designed to rankle legislators: one rejected an increase in disability payments to a police officer who had slipped on an ice patch. Others reflect his ramrod-straight views on ethics and government waste — knocking down a special pension deal for a state legislator; rejecting a subsidy to Medicaid payments so

nursing homes could provide kosher meals to Jewish residents.

"He seemed to take great delight in vetoing bills," recalled his director of legislative affairs, John O'Keefe. "Some of the bills we would chuckle when we wrote the veto message."

By 2004, the second year of his term, Mr. Romney was provoked enough to mount an unprecedented campaign to unseat Democratic legislators, spending \$3 million in Republican Party money and hiring a nationally known political strategist, Michael Murphy, to plan the battle.

The effort failed spectacularly. Republicans lost seats, leaving them with their smallest legislative delegation since 1867. Democratic lawmakers were reported to have been deeply angered by the campaign's tactics.

On close scrutiny, some of the bipartisan successes that Mr. Romney claimed in the Wednesday debate turn out to be peppered with asterisks.

On education, Mr. Romney was correct in stating that Massachusetts students were ranked first in the nation during his tenure. Students in grades four and eight took top honors in reading and mathematics on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

However, educators largely credit an overarching reform of state schools 10 years earlier under Governor Weld. The reforms doubled state spending on schools and brought standards and accountability to administrators and students.

"Governor Romney does not get to take the credit for achieving that No. 1 ranking," said Mike Gilbert, field director for the nonprofit Massachusetts Association of School Committees, "but it did happen while he was in office."

Mr. Romney's claim that he was responsible for 19 separate tax cuts is also technically accurate, but not the full story. In 2005, for example, Mr. Romney's administration wrote legislation refunding \$250 million in capital gains taxes — but the bill came only in response to a court ruling that the taxes had been illegally withheld in 2002.

Many of the other tax cuts were first proposed by the legislature, not Mr. Romney, and others were routine extensions of existing tax reductions or were one-day sales tax holidays.

Leading Maryland And Virginia, With Stars On The Rise
Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times**By Adeshina Emmanuel**

Maryland and Virginia share a history rich in both rivalry and cooperation, and the same can be said for their governors.

Both Martin O'Malley, the Democrat who leads Maryland, and Bob McDonnell, his Republican counterpart in Virginia, are rising political stars. Each is chairman of his party's national governors' association, and each is a standard-bearer for his party's presidential nominee. Each is also mentioned as a possible 2016 presidential candidate.

Some people say that much of the talk about a Maryland-Virginia face-off is overblown. As for the governors, each says that if there is in fact a rivalry, his state is winning it.

"I'm just trying to do what is right for Virginia, and I'm sure Governor O'Malley is trying to do the same, but we have different philosophies and different outcomes," said Mr. McDonnell, a former member of the Virginia House of Delegates and a former state attorney general.

Much of that difference has to do with taxes. Mr. McDonnell, elected in 2009 and limited by law to one term, takes pride in his efforts to burnish Virginia's reputation as a low-tax, business-friendly state. Sales tax is 5 percent in Virginia and 6 percent in Maryland. Top-bracket income-tax payers pay 5.75 percent in Virginia while those in Maryland pay 9 percent. Virginia's corporate tax rate is 6 percent and Maryland's is 8.25 percent. Virginia's unemployment rate is 5.6 percent, compared with 7.1 percent in Maryland — both lower than the national average.

Working with Republican majorities in both chambers of the state legislature, Mr. McDonnell has been able to balance the state's budget without raising taxes, though critics have derided some of his solutions as gimmicks, notably some approaches to financing future state pensions. And, like other Virginia governors from both parties, he has been chided for putting off long-term investments in highways and mass transit.

Mr. O'Malley, a former Baltimore mayor, has a reputation, for better or for worse, of raising taxes — more than 20 separate increases since becoming governor in 2008. It is a legacy that a Republican opponent might find an irresistible target if Mr. O'Malley ever runs for president.

Early in his first term he called a special session in the General Assembly that resulted in \$1.4 billion

in increases in taxes on sales, tobacco, personal income and corporations. He also levied a temporary tax on millionaires. More recently, with the state facing a \$1 billion budget deficit in 2013, he signed a tax increase on Maryland's top earners that ensured them one of the highest income tax rates in the country.

Mr. O'Malley argues that tax rates are just one measure of a state's standing.

"On the other side of the river, especially under Governor McDonnell, they would have you believe that it all begins and ends with tax rate," Mr. O'Malley said. "We all strive to be competitive on that score." He added, "But there are other things that determine whether or not your state is well-equipped and whether your children are more likely to be winners or losers in a changing economy."

He mentioned that Maryland is first in median income, while Virginia is eighth, and that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce ranks Maryland first in innovation and entrepreneurship, while Virginia again ranks eighth. He also noted that Maryland had the fourth-highest percentage of workers in "green jobs," in 2010, compared with Virginia at 20th, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Green Goods and Services Survey released in March.

Mr. O'Malley noted that Education Week ranks his state as No. 1 in K-12 public education. He also argued that he has been more committed to investing in public education than has Mr. McDonnell. For the 2012-13 school year, Virginia's financing for K-12 education decreased by 10 percent compared with 2008 levels, while Maryland's investment increased 7.4 percent.

Mr. O'Malley says he has invested in human capital to urge Maryland toward "building an economy for the future that will last," through maximizing educational attainment, developing worker skills and focusing on emerging sectors including life sciences and biotechnology.

The roles of Mr. O'Malley and Mr. McDonnell as leaders of their governors' associations put them on a national stage as stewards of their parties' message and approach to governance. There are now 29 states with Republican governors, 20 headed by Democrats and one with an independent. Eleven states have governors' elections this year.

"Yeah, I want to win as many governors' races as I can," Mr. McDonnell said. "But not because I'm in competition with Governor O'Malley, but

because I really do believe the 29 Republican governors are doing some unique things in reforming government in their states and giving new birth to federalism. Because they focus on fiscal responsibility and low taxes and limited government they are getting better results for their people."

He added, "I say this not just about Virginia and Maryland, but I could say it about Wisconsin and Illinois or other Republican governors."

Mr. O'Malley, of course, is not so upbeat about the impact of Republican governors.

"Some of these newly elected governors who were elected in 2010 or even 2009 promised they would restore the economy," Mr. O'Malley said. "Instead when they got in, they governed by rolling back individual rights — rolling back women's rights, rolling back voters' rights, rolling back workers' rights. The people in a lot of the states — Ohio, Florida and others — are scratching their heads and feeling a bit of buyer's remorse for putting in people with such a narrow right-wing ideology."

Despite their differences, Mr. O'Malley, 49, and Mr. O'Donnell, 58, are friendly on the regional level and have more in common than just their Irish-Catholic backgrounds and rising fame. They have worked together on regional issues, including the cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay, public safety in the capital region and transportation issues. By most accounts, the men and their staffs have a good working relationship with each other.

Both men said they would be open to a different type of partnership: "I understand he is a pretty good guitar player," Mr. McDonnell said of Mr. O'Malley, who plays and sings in an Irish rock band. "We ought to get together; I play the drums, although I don't play them well."

Mr. O'Malley sounded intrigued by the prospect.

"Does he have a practice tape or anything he can send us?" he asked. "I'd love to jam with him, it'd be fun. I'm totally open — music is nonpartisan."

DSCC's Arizona Investment Hits \$1.5 Million Friday, October 5, 2012

Politico

By Alexander Burns

The Arizona Senate air war heated up fast this week as both parties' Senate campaign committees dropped hundreds of thousands of dollars into the state — and at least on the Democratic side, that was just the beginning.

The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee reserved another \$500,000 in airtime between Oct. 9 and 15, a source tells me. That follows the initial \$526,000 investment I reported earlier this week.

And the committee's Arizona spending total is actually even higher than that: In addition to all that independent expenditure money, I'm told the DSCC has spent \$500,000 in coordinated money with its Senate nominee, Richard Carmona.

Outside groups on both sides are also on the air in the state, making this election — which Republicans believed was a near-certain thing at the start of the cycle — a surprisingly hard-fought contest as it heads into the final weeks.

Read more about: Arizona, Jeff Flake, Richard Carmona, National Republican Senatorial Committee, 2012 Elections, Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee

In New Jersey Senate Race, Sticking Close To The Script

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Kate Zernike

MONTCLAIR, N.J. — At the opening of the debate between the candidates for United States Senate here on Thursday night, the moderator noted that their campaigns had slid into the familiar broad themes of Republican versus Democrat: he cares only about the wealthy; he is a tax-and-spender. The moderator pressed them for specifics: What is one thing that makes your opponent less qualified than you?

The Democratic incumbent, Senator Robert Menendez, responded that his Republican opponent, State Senator Joe Kyrillos, supported tax cuts for the wealthy. Mr. Kyrillos blamed Democrats in Congress for 43 straight months of unemployment above 8 percent. The two men have clung to generic partisan outlines throughout the campaign, with few specifics or exchanges to remind voters that the race is not taking place in Any State, U.S.A.

Mr. Menendez, running for his second full term, is ahead in polls and is hoping to stay there by capitalizing on President Obama's popularity in New Jersey.

Mr. Kyrillos, a close friend of Gov. Chris Christie, is hoping to recreate the governor's electoral success in 2009. But he is running in a state that has not elected a Republican to the Senate since 1972.

Mr. Kyrillos's campaign has appealed broadly to voter frustration with Washington. "If you think things are just fine, that things are O.K. here in New Jersey and across the land, well, then you'll choose my opponent again," he said at the hourlong debate at Montclair State University, which was televised live.

"But if you think that unemployment doubling under his watch, the deficit quadrupling, our national debt doubling is unacceptable," he added, "then you're going to make a change." (National unemployment figures reported on Friday showed the rate dropping below 8 percent, to 7.8.)

Echoing Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential nominee, Mr. Kyrillos added: "I believe in America. I believe we can do better."

Mr. Menendez, 58, has sought to present himself as the champion of the middle class, and to lump his opponent with the extreme wing of the Republican Party, arguing that he cannot simultaneously cut the deficit and cut taxes, as Mr. Kyrillos has proposed. (Mr. Menendez borrowed from Mr. Obama, who borrowed from former President Bill Clinton: "That arithmetic doesn't work.")

He accused Mr. Kyrillos of supporting the "Paul Ryan budget," which would privatize parts of Social Security and offer Medicare vouchers. Mr. Kyrillos rejected the association, saying, "We're going to have a Joe Kyrillos budget."

Both men speak often about their immigrant parents, and both have long histories in state party politics. Mr. Menendez comes out of the rough and tumble of Hudson County, which is overwhelmingly Democratic. He was elected mayor of Union City at 32, and later to the State Assembly, State Senate and Congress, before being appointed in 2006 to his seat by Jon S. Corzine, his predecessor, who had been elected governor. He helped his party narrowly hold on to its Senate majority against the Republican headwinds of 2010.

Mr. Kyrillos, 52, comes from well-to-do Monmouth County, which has leaned Republican and includes well-off suburbs. He served four years in the Assembly before winning his Senate seat in 1992, and served as chairman of the state's Republican Party from 2001 to 2004.

Mr. Christie introduced Mr. Kyrillos to the woman he would marry. He has been a loyal soldier for the governor, supporting a property-tax cap and initiatives to reverse the effects of a court ruling

that requires the state to help equalize spending between rich and poor school districts.

In a Fairleigh Dickinson PublicMind poll early last month, Mr. Menendez was ahead, 50 percent to 36 percent, among registered and likely voters. He had \$10.2 million when the campaigns last reported their totals in July. Mr. Kyrillos had \$3.1 million. But Mr. Menendez faced a tough race in 2006, and is known for running as though he were 10 points behind.

His campaign has accused Mr. Kyrillos of changing his position on abortion rights — he says he supports them but marked "pro life" on a questionnaire last year — and wanting to overturn popular portions of the Affordable Care Act. The campaign has pressed for women's votes, noting that Mr. Kyrillos declined to vote on a resolution supporting an equal-pay act.

Mr. Kyrillos, more velveteen and affable, does not come off as an extremist. He said that he was unfamiliar with the questionnaire, but that he supported parental notifications and waiting periods for abortions — positions, he said, most voters also support.

At the debate on Thursday, Mr. Kyrillos declined to answer when asked if he would support a Supreme Court nominee who would most likely vote to overturn the law barring federal recognition of same-sex marriage. He said only that he would give a fair hearing to a president's nominees.

He has struggled against low name recognition. In an August poll by the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers, 24 percent of Republican voters did not know him.

That poll was done before he began running television advertisements. And his campaign said it expected Mr. Christie to participate in several events for him in the month before Election Day.

NEAR EAST & NORTH AFRICA

Syrian Warplanes Strike Homs As Rebels Claim To Capture Base

Friday, October 5, 2012

New York Times

By Tim Arango, Hwaida Saad And Alan Cowell

Syrian government warplanes and artillery were reported on Friday to have launched a ferocious barrage against the central city of Homs while, near the capital, Damascus, rebels said they captured an air defense base with a cache of surface-to-air missiles.

The fighting came a day after the bloody, 18-month conflict raised broad fears of regional repercussions when Turkish artillery hit Syria for a second consecutive day on Thursday following a mortar attack on Wednesday that killed five Turkish civilians. Turkey's Parliament reinforced Ankara's resolute message by authorizing further military action against Syria.

The confrontation between the two countries along the divide between the NATO alliance and the Arab world threatened to escalate a confrontation that has highlighted Turkey's fraught double role as it tries to stay out of direct involvement in the fight against President Bashar al-Assad of Syria while offering haven and support to the rebels.

Inside war-battered Syria, Friday's bombardment of Homs by airstrikes, tank and mortar fire subjected rebel strongholds to their heaviest bombardment in months, according to The Associated Press quoting activists. Some analysts suggested that the focus on big cities like Homs and Aleppo further north showed that the government was maintaining its focus on urban warfare rather than regional maneuvering.

Anti-government activists also reported that security forces, led by 4,000 Republican Guards, stormed the Qudsaya area on the outskirts of Damascus, following shelling of the area on Thursday. The area is on the hills above Damascus near the presidential palace and a key area where the government wants to maintain control.

For their part, the insurgents said on Friday that they fought back against government advances, capturing an air defense base with a cache of missiles on Thursday.

Reinforcing the claim, video posted on YouTube showed rebels clad in military uniforms in front of a military installation with black smoke spiraling upward.

Another video showed a jubilant fighter, bearded, wearing a crisp camouflage flak vest and carrying a semiautomatic rifle, clambering onto a trailer carrying what appeared to be a surface-to-air missile. Off camera, a voice hails the man, Abu Khattab, as the leader of the unit that claimed to have captured the base. "Thank god! Praise god!" voices cry as he raises his rifle and screams: "Get out, Bashar, you're not strong enough to carry a missile!"

Yet another video, which purported to document the shooting down of a Syrian warplane near the base on Friday, showed an out-of-control aircraft in the distance tumbling from a low altitude

followed by a burst of thick black smoke, presumably from the impact.

There was no means of independently verifying the claims or the videos since access to Syria is severely restricted.

There were no immediate reports on Friday of further Turkish artillery strikes, but reporters in the border area said civilians seemed to be avoiding places near the frontier for fear of further exchanges.

Beyond its military purposes, the Turkish retaliation was seen as a reaction to growing public frustration with Turkey's policy toward Syria — which has done little to push out Mr. Assad, while bringing hardship to Turks, who have lost trade and have been forced to take in about 100,000 refugees. The Turkish leadership also feels that it has been left alone by Western allies to manage an increasingly combustible situation, experts and commentators said.

"I don't see what else the government could do," said Soli Ozel, an academic and a columnist, who said he viewed Turkey's response as one of restraint that made good on warnings that it would strike Syria if its border were threatened. "That is the least they could do. They have so tied themselves to massive retaliation rhetoric that they had to do something."

Turkish gunners fired into Syria after weeks in which towns in southeastern Turkey had been hit by stray bullets and shells coming from Syria. The parliamentary measure, which was ratified after several hours of a closed-door session in the capital, Ankara, permits cross-border raids, although senior officials insisted that Turkey, a member of NATO, was not the aggressor.

"Turkey does not want war with Syria," Ibrahim Kalin, a senior aide to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, wrote on Twitter. "But Turkey is capable of protecting its borders and will retaliate when necessary." In a separate message, he said that "political, diplomatic initiatives will continue."

In supporting the Syrian rebels by allowing weapons smuggling and the cross-border flow of fighters and refugees — and enduring the spillover effects of economic collapse in border areas and errant munitions — the government had little choice but to respond militarily, analysts said, even if the strike on Turkish territory was unintentional.

And ever since Syria downed a Turkish warplane in June, the government has been under domestic pressure to act.

"Many felt disappointed about the government's lack of action when Syria shot down a Turkish warplane in June and got away with it," said Nihat Ali Ozcan, an analyst at the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey.

Given that fighting had been raging just across the border, some analysts said it was not surprising that munitions struck within Turkey — which sent more tanks and antiaircraft weapons to the border on Thursday — and questioned the intensity of Turkey's response.

"I think the Syrians truly overshot," said Soner Cagaptay, the director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He added: "The question is why did Turkey respond the way it did? I think this is Ankara's retaliation to the Syrians' shooting down the Turkish plane in June."

The episode may also have pointed to Turkey's increasingly close relationship with the rebels. Though its military said it used radar to identify targets, rebels claimed on Thursday that they aided the Turkish military in its targeting for the artillery strikes.

An antigovernment fighter and activist in the area in Syria where the Turkish shells struck said he helped the Turks fire shells that killed 14 soldiers and destroyed several armored vehicles.

The fighter, Ayham al-Khalaf, said in an interview by Skype that shortly after the Syrian shell hit Turkish territory, a Turkish officer contacted him. "He was speaking in a broken Arabic accent, asking my help getting the exact location of the artillery battery," Mr. Khalaf said. "So I Googled the location, and I gave them exact details about the location and the distance."

For weeks, Turkey's leaders have faced a public backlash over their aggressive posture toward Syria, a sentiment owed partly to a feeling that Turkey may be on the right side in the fight but that it is isolated, without the backing of its Western allies, including the United States, as China, Russia and Iran have lined up forcefully behind the government of Mr. Assad. That feeling deepened after the latest crisis.

"We are now at a very critical juncture," Melih Asik, a columnist, wrote in the centrist newspaper Milliyet. "We are not only facing Syria, but Iran, Iraq, Russia and China are behind it as well. Behind us, we have nothing but the provocative stance and empty promises of the U.S."

Even if the decision to strike was partly motivated by flagging domestic support, the strike came

against overwhelming opposition among the public for unilateral military action, according to a recent poll. The poll, conducted by the Strategic and Social Research Center, based in Ankara, found that 76 percent of Turks living in cities opposed unilateral military intervention, and that 56 percent believed that the government had mismanaged the Syria crisis. In addition, 66 percent said Turkey should not allow Syrian refugees into the country. The telephone survey was conducted last month in 27 urban areas.

"I doubt that much will have changed after this incident," said Mr. Ozel, the academic and columnist.

Some of the public opposition to a unilateral strike against Syria was reflected on the streets in Istanbul on Thursday evening, when a few thousand protesters marched down a central avenue, chanting antiwar slogans and railing against Mr. Erdogan and his governing party, the Justice and Development Party.

In a letter to the United Nations, Turkey called on the Security Council to "take the necessary measures against Syria's offensive actions toward Turkey."

On Thursday, despite initial resistance from Russia, the Security Council unanimously condemned "in the strongest terms" Syria's shelling of the Turkish town. In its statement, the council said that "this incident highlighted the grave impact the crisis in Syria has on the security of its neighbors and on regional peace and stability."

Russia and China both vetoed three previous Security Council resolutions addressing the Syria conflict and have urged Western powers to put more pressure on the antigovernment forces to stop fighting. Russian protection of the Assad government is one reason cited by analysts for Syria's refusal to put into effect any kind of cease-fire.

NATO held an emergency meeting on Wednesday night and condemned the attack, but it did not suggest that it would invoke the clause in its charter that would require a collective response by NATO allies to the conflagration between Syria and Turkey.

Tim Arango reported from Istanbul, Hwaïda Saad from Beirut, Lebanon, and Alan Cowell from Paris. Reporting was contributed by Sebnem Arsu from Istanbul; Hala Droubi, Hania Mourtada and Anne Barnard from Beirut; and Neil MacFarquhar from the United Nations.

Syrian Regime Opens New Urban Front, Shells Homs

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Karin Laub, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Syrian military opened a second urban front Friday, attacking the rebel stronghold of Homs with the most intense artillery barrage in months and putting opposition fighters there and in Syria's largest city, Aleppo, increasingly on the defensive.

Syria's civil war has been locked in a bloody stalemate, and embattled President Bashar Assad could extend his hold on power if he retakes Aleppo and Homs. Amateur video from Homs, a symbol of resistance, showed black columns of smoke rising from the city, as loud explosions went off every few seconds.

While Assad stepped up attacks at home, tensions with neighboring Turkey flared again Friday, reviving fears that the 18-month-old conflict in Syria could ignite a regional conflagration.

The crisis began on Wednesday, when a Syrian shell killed five civilians in a Turkish border town and triggered unprecedented artillery strikes by Turkey, coupled with warnings that Turkey would no longer tolerate such acts. On Friday, a Syrian mortar round again hit inside Turkey, causing no injuries, and Turkish troops returned fire, the state-run news agency Anadolu said.

In the past, Turkey did not respond to stray Syrian shells, but Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan suggested Friday that those days are over. "I once again call on Assad's regime and its supporters: Do not try to test Turkey's patience, do not try to test Turkey's limits," Erdogan said.

Earlier in the day, Turkey had deployed more troops on its border with Syria.

The U.S. sided with Turkey, condemning what White House spokesman Josh Earnest called the "aggressive actions of the Syrians." Earnest said Turkey's response was appropriate and that the U.S. stands by Turkey, a NATO ally.

Still, there were signs that both sides are trying to defuse the situation.

Since Wednesday's deadly shelling, Syria has pulled tanks and other military equipment away from the border, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with government regulations. He said the

weaponry was moved far enough to remove the "perception of threat."

Syrian officials could not be reached for comment.

Turkey, along with other countries siding with the rebels, is averse to intervening militarily, while Assad has also tried to avoid provocations he believes would trigger a foreign intervention.

Undeterred by its troubles with Turkey, the Syrian regime on Friday launched a new offensive against Homs, unleashing heavy shelling and air attacks. The attack is the worst Homs has seen in five months, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a network of activists on the ground.

"Around dawn, the regime went crazy and started shelling hysterically," Homs-based activist Abu Rami told The Associated Press via Skype from rebel-held Old Homs. "An average of five rockets a minute are falling," he said, asking to be identified by his nickname for fear of reprisal. Most residents who still live in rebel-held areas around the city were hiding in shelters, he said.

Regime forces fired rockets and mortar shells at the rebel-held neighborhoods of Old Homs, Khaldiya, Qusour and Jouret el-Shayah, the activist said, adding that regime forces were also targeting villages around Homs and the rebel-held town of Rastan to the north.

Earlier this week, Syrian refugees in Lebanon said their villages in Homs province had come under heavy air attack from so-called barrel bombs, makeshift weapons consisting of containers stuffed with explosives.

Mohammed Yousef, a 25-year-old rebel fighter taking a break from battle in the Lebanese border town of Arsal, said most homes in his village, Zar'a, were leveled in the recent air attacks. Yousef said he fled last week, after his home was destroyed.

Homs, Syria's third largest city and a center of the uprising against Assad, was subjected to intense regime shelling in February and March, the first area to suffer widespread devastation. The regime assault slowed in April, as the focus shifted to other areas, including Aleppo, where rebels first seized control of some areas in an offensive in late July.

After weeks of stalemate in Aleppo, rebel fighters announced a new push last week to take the city, but the regime has fought back hard, shelling from tanks and bombing from the air.

An AP journalist in Aleppo said fighting has intensified this week, and that the rebels appear to be losing some ground in close-quarter combat. Over a period of a few days, rebels lost control of several buildings in one of the front-line neighborhoods, Saif al-Dawla, he said.

Syria's conflict began with a peaceful uprising against Assad, inspired by last year's Arab Spring rebellions against authoritarian rulers. Amid an escalating regime crackdown, the rebellion gradually turned into a civil war. The regime's troops are stretched thin, enabling rebels to control large stretches of countryside in Syria's most densely populated west.

But neither side has been able to deliver a decisive blow, even though the Syrian military has superior weapons, including combat aircraft. In recent weeks, rebels have been targeting Syrian aircraft and air bases in hopes of reducing the regime's advantage.

On Friday, amateur video posted by activists showed what appeared to be a Syrian government helicopter hurtling to the ground with a trail of white smoke behind it. Rami Abdul-Rahman, the head of the Observatory, said he was told by rebels that the helicopter was hit over Saqba, a town east of Damascus.

Another video, posted late Thursday, showed the purported capture of an air defense base by rebels. The video showed dozens of gunmen outside an area where smoke was billowing. Off camera, one gunman says a "missile air defense battalion" had been captured. Another video showed missiles inside a room.

Activist Mohammed Saeed, based in the Damascus suburb of Douma, said rebels captured an air defense base in the Eastern Ghouta area near the capital on Monday.

Syria imposes tight restrictions on foreign journalists and the content of amateur videos cannot be confirmed independently.

The rebels did not give any other evidence that would confirm the capture of a base, or identify the location of the video.

If confirmed, the capture of a stock of working anti-aircraft missiles would be a boost to a lightly-armed rebel force that says it faces frequent attacks by low-flying helicopters and warplanes.

Associated Press Writer Suzan Fraser In Ankara, Turkey, contributed to this report.

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Rebels Say West's Inaction Is Pushing Syrians To Extremism

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By C. J. Chivers

SAMAS, Syria — Majed al-Muhammad, the commander of a Syrian antigovernment fighting group, slammed his hand on his desk. "Doesn't America have satellites?" he asked, almost shouting. "Can't it see what is happening?"

A retired Syrian Army medic, Mr. Muhammad had reached the rank of sergeant major in the military he now fights against. He said he had never been a member of a party, and loathed jihadists and terrorists.

But he offered a warning to the West now commonly heard among fighters seeking the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad: The Syrian people are being radicalized by a combination of a grinding conflict and their belief that they have been abandoned by a watching world.

If the West continues to turn its back on Syria's suffering, he said, Syrians will turn their backs in return, and this may imperil Western interests and security at one of the crossroads of the Middle East.

This is a theme that has resonated in recent days, not just in Syria, but in Turkey, where the government fired artillery shells into northern Syria this week after a Syrian mortar round hit a Turkish town and killed five civilians. In Turkey, there is a growing sense of frustration shared by the Syrian rebels that the West, the United States in particular, called for Mr. Assad to leave power, only to sit quietly on the sidelines as the crisis transformed into a bloody civil war.

"We are now at a very critical juncture," wrote Melih Asik in the Turkish newspaper Milliyet. "We are not only facing Syria, but Iran, Iraq, Russia and China behind it as well. Behind us, we have nothing but the provocative stance and empty promises of the U.S."

Across northern Syria, in areas that rebels have wrested from government control, such sentiments have become an angry and routine element of the public discourse. Wearied by violence, heading into another winter of fighting, and enraged by what they see as the inaction and

hypocrisy of powerful nations, frontline leaders of the rebellion say that the West risks losing a potential ally in the Middle East if the Assad government should fall.

The corollary is frequently sounded, too: The West may be gaining enemies where it might have found friends. As anger grows, armed groups opposed to the United States may grow in numbers and stature, too.

"The United Nations and international community are making a big mistake," said Ghassan Abdul Wahib, 43, a truck driver and now a leader in Kafr Takharim, a village in the north. "By letting this be a long war, they are dragging Syria toward radicalism, and they will suffer from this for a long time."

The origins of these sentiments are typically the same: a widely held view that Washington and European capitals are more interested in maintaining the flow of oil from Libya and Iraq, or in protecting Israel, than in Syria and its people's suffering. The view is supported, Syrians opposed to Mr. Assad say, by the West's stubborn refusal to provide weapons to the rebels, or to protect civilians and aid the rebels with a no-fly zone.

The contrast with the West's military assistance and vocal political support to the uprising last year in Libya is frequently drawn.

The donations of nonlethal aid to the Syrian opposition by Washington are often called small-scale, to the extent that none of the half-dozen fighting groups visited by journalists for The New York Times, or the many commanders interviewed in Turkey, claimed to have seen, much less received, American aid.

"We haven't received anything from the outside," said Thayar, a member of the ad hoc governing body in Kafr Takharim known as the revolutionary council. (He asked that his last name be withheld to protect him and his family from retaliation.) "We read in the media that we are receiving things. But we haven't seen it. We only received speeches from the West."

Other men echoed this sentiment, and accused the United States and Europe of playing a double game, in effect of conspiring with the Kremlin to ensure that no nation has to act against the Assad government or on the rebels' or civilians' behalf.

In this view, the Kremlin's insistence that it will not support further action against Syria is regarded as convenient for the White House, which, many commanders and fighters said, issues statements supporting the uprising and

condemning the Assad government knowing it will not have to back up words with deeds. Russia has provided weapons and diplomatic support to the Assad government and blocked action by the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Wahib, the leader in Kafr Takharim, dismissed the discussions in the United Nations as a choreographed show. "The whole world is now trying to destroy Syria," he said. "The international community knows that Assad is dead, but they want war so it destroys Syria and puts us back 100 years. In this way, Israel will be safe."

"The United Nations," he added, "is a partner in destroying Syria."

Like many activists and fighters, he had a derisive view of what had once been hailed in Western capitals as an achievement by NATO — the military intervention in Libya last year, which Western leaders have said protected civilians and which enabled disorganized rebels to defeat their country's conventional military.

That campaign was not perfect. NATO killed and wounded many civilians whom it has refused to acknowledge or help. As the war dragged on, many armed groups formed, casting the country's long-term security in doubt and, after the attack last month on the American diplomatic mission in Benghazi, jeopardizing Western engagement, too.

But Syrians opposed to Mr. Assad still crave Western military assistance, even if it would only be a no-fly zone to ground the Syrian Air Force, whose aircraft have been attacking cities and towns since this summer. The United States, however, has so far ruled out military involvement in Syria.

Many Syrian men also bristled under what they called common descriptions that their uprising is driven by foreign fighters, or hosts groups linked to Al Qaeda.

"We are not terrorists like the regime says," said Abu Muhammad, a teacher in Deir Sonbul. "We are fighting for dignity, which has been raped for 40 years."

In this environment of acrimony and charge and countercharge, the anger of Majed al-Muhammad, the retired sergeant major, was of a type fueled by frustration and loss.

A few days before he received journalists in his office here, from where he commands 200 fighters in the northern highlands of Jebel al-Zawiya, he learned that his sister had been killed in

Damascus. A photograph of her bloodied remains, crumpled on the ground, was on his cellphone; he displayed the image with rage.

Then he moved to a collection of ordnance remnants on a table beside his desk. He held up an expended tank shell. "Is it possible for the government to use this against the people?" he asked.

He lifted the remains of an S-5 rocket, an air-to-ground weapon in common use by the Syrian Air Force's helicopters and jets. He asked if citizens of the United States would tolerate what Syria's opposition has endured, and not ask for weapons and help, too.

"Is it possible for your helicopters to fire this into the crowds?" He was fuming. His voice rose again. "Do we have the right to live, or not?"

Turkey Retaliates Against Syrian Fire For 3rd Day

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Washington Post

By Liz Sly

BEIRUT — Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Friday that Turkey and Syria are "not far" from war as the two countries exchanged mortar fire across their border for a third consecutive day.

The belligerent remarks and the continued shelling sustained fears that the countries are drifting toward war more than a year after Turkey threw its support behind Syrian opposition demands for the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad, reversing a decade of warming relations.

Turkish officials said that Turkey's military fired mortar rounds into Syria on Friday evening after a Syrian shell crashed into farmland in the southern province of Hatay, more than 200 miles from the site of shelling by Syria on Wednesday that killed five people in the Turkish town of Akcakale.

That attack triggered almost immediate Turkish retaliation against Syria in the most serious cross-border incident since the Syrian uprising evolved into an armed rebellion last year. Although it was not the first time shells fired in Syria had strayed into Turkey, Turkish officials said this strike was different because it involved more than six shells fired simultaneously at the same area, and because civilians died. The shell fired into Turkey on Friday caused no casualties, and Syria did not comment on the incident.

In a speech in Istanbul on Friday, Erdogan made it clear that Turkey is prepared to go to war to

defend its territory, a day after the Turkish parliament authorized the government to carry out military operations beyond its borders.

"We are not interested in war, but we're not far from it either," Erdogan said, adding, "When they say, 'If you want peace, prepare for war,' it means that when the time comes, war becomes the key to peace."

The flare-up of tensions along the Turkish border has intensified fears that the Syrian revolt, which has already polarized the region along sectarian lines, could spill beyond its territory. Turkey and the Persian Gulf's Sunni leaders have lined up behind the rebels, while the Shiite-led governments of Iran, Lebanon and Iraq support Assad.

In another indication of the ways Syria's neighbors in the region are being drawn into the conflict, the Free Syrian Army battalion that claimed in August to have kidnapped 48 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps warned that it would begin executing the hostages unless the Assad government halts attacks on civilian areas within 48 hours.

In a video aired on the al-

Arabiya network, a uniformed rebel claiming to represent the Baraa battalion threatened to kill one Iranian hostage for every Syrian killed after the deadline passes. There was no immediate comment from Iran, which has acknowledged that at least some of the men were retired members of the elite Iranian unit and has also admitted that it has sent military advisers to help the government in Syria.

The East Ghouta suburb of Damascus, where the battalion is based, has been the target of an intensified government offensive in recent days, but the rebels have fought back. On Friday, they claimed to have shot down a government helicopter and posted a video on YouTube showing a burning helicopter spiraling through the sky to the ground. On Thursday, the rebels also claimed to have captured a significant air defense base in the area complete with sophisticated air-defense systems and surface-to-air missiles.

Government forces also unleashed an unusually heavy attack on the central city of Homs, where rebel-held neighborhoods have been besieged and regularly shelled by loyalist forces for months. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it was the heaviest bombardment there in months. The Local Coordination Committees, an opposition group, said seven

people were killed, among 40 who died nationwide in government attacks.

Ahmed Ramadan contributed to this report.

Turkey Fires At Syria After Another Mortar Hits

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkish troops fired at Syria again Friday, responding to another mortar shell from Syria that struck Turkish territory, the country's state-run news agency said.

The shelling came hours after Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on Syria not to test Turkey's patience.

The Anadolu Agency quoted Gov. Celalettin Lekesiz as saying a mortar shell hit 50 meters (yards) inside the border in a rural area near the village of Asagipulluyaz in Hatay province.

No one was hurt by the mortar, but Turkish troops based in the area immediately responded with fire, he said.

Turkish artillery has fired at Syrian targets for two straight days after shelling from Syria killed five Turkish civilians on Wednesday.

Turkey's parliament voted Thursday to allow cross-border military operations in Syria, sharply escalating tensions between the two former allies.

Erdogan on Friday renewed a call for Syria not to challenge Turkey.

"I call on those who try to test Turkey's limits and determination: That would be a grave mistake. We are not bluffing," he said.

The Syrian uprising against President Bashar Assad erupted in March 2011 and has gradually morphed into a bloody civil war, killing more than 30,000 people, according to activists.

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Turkey Prime Minister Warns War Is Near As His Forces Pound Syria For Third Day

Saturday, October 6, 2012

McClatchy

By By Roy Gutman, McClatchy Newspapers

One day after winning blanket authority to send forces into Syria, Turkey's prime minister warned Friday that his country is "not far from war" and said that it would be a "deadly mistake" for the Syrian government to test Turkey's will.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan made the comments as the Turkish military fired shells into Syria for the third straight day — retaliation for a mortar shell that landed just inside Turkish territory in Hatay province, according to the provincial governor.

Until Wednesday, when a Syrian shell killed five civilians in the border town of Akcakale, several hundred miles to the east, Turkey had avoided responding to what have appeared to be errant shells fired into Turkish territory by Syrian troops battling rebel forces for control of crossing points.

But after the five deaths Wednesday, Turkey appears to be retaliating for any Syrian shell that lands inside Turkey. On Thursday, a Syrian shell landed near the border in the town of Altinozou, causing no injuries but sparking a Turkish response. There were also no reports of Turkish injuries in the Friday shelling.

Turkish media reported, however, that at least seven Syrian soldiers were killed in Turkish shelling Wednesday and Thursday and a temporary Syrian military base was destroyed. It was unknown whether Syrian troops suffered casualties Friday from the Turkish shelling.

Two Turkish media outlets reported that the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad had taken steps to avoid further border clashes with Turkey, ordering the Syrian air force not to send fixed-wing combat aircraft or helicopters within six miles of the Turkish border.

Erdogan's rhetoric left little doubt that the confrontation with Syria could flare into war, though he said he was not seeking a war.

"We have not, do not and will not fail to respond to any attempt to injure the dignity of our country," Erdogan told a gathering in Istanbul. "I wish to state that we are not only not enthusiastic about war, we are also not far from war."

Erdogan reminded his audience that Turkey, "when necessary," has participated in inter-continental wars previously and quoted an adage: "Be ready for war if you want peace and goodness."

"Anyone trying to test Turkey's capacity for determination . . . would be making a deadly mistake," he said. "We are not bluffing. We are not dealing in hollow statements."

Erdogan, once an Assad ally, denounced what he called the Syrian government's "state terror," describing it as a "mentality that attacks its own

people, does not value its own cities, its own cultural heritage, that bombs its own towns."

"Such a brutal and merciless regime has long since lost its legitimacy, and any chance for its survival is completely lost," he said. "God willing the Syrian people will be saved from this tyranny as soon as possible."

Turkey has long supported the rebels seeking to topple Assad but has failed to win international support for opening a so-called humanitarian corridor into Syria that would allow Assad opponents to operate in a safe zone, free of concerns of attacks by forces loyal to the government. Its new aggressiveness, however, could have that impact, at least in a six-mile-wide strip along the Turkish border.

Fikret Bila, a columnist for the newspaper Milliyet, said in a television discussion that the Syrian ban on air movements, which he said he had learned of from military sources, meant that there was now an effective buffer zone, "at least from the perspective of airspace."

Two days of Turkish artillery barrages also provided important relief for the rebels, destroying a base the Syrian military had established near the town of Tal al Abyad after rebels captured the Syrian side of the Akcakale border crossing several weeks ago.

The skirmishing along the border between Syrian forces loyal to and opposed to Assad was not the only potential flashpoint in Turkish-Syrian relations.

In a step that Turkey might find threatening, Assad reportedly has allowed a Kurdish political faction in northern Syria to establish a combat battalion in Qamishli, the biggest predominantly Kurdish city in northern Syria. The decision would place Qamishli under the control of the military wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party of Syria, known by its Kurdish initials as the PYD. The PYD is closely linked with the PKK, or Kurdistan Workers Party, which has fought a guerrilla war for decades to establish an independent Kurdish state in southern Turkey and has killed dozens of Turkish civilians and soldiers in recent months as it undertook a new offensive.

The development was reported by the Kurdish Firat News Agency, which reports in Turkish.

Mona Yacoubian of the Stimson Center, a Washington think tank, said the Kurdish dimension of the Syrian uprising "is going to gain in prominence" as Assad's military loses control of territory. She said the assertion of control by

Kurdish nationalists tied to the PKK, if it leads to more attacks against Turkish targets, would cross a Turkish "red line."

With Erdogan's new war powers, Turkey will "feel compelled to respond," she said.

McClatchy special correspondent Joel Thomas contributed from Istanbul.

Woman Bids To Lead Egypt Islamist Party Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Maggie Fick, Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — For the first time, a woman is running for the leadership of the political party of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's most powerful Islamist group. Sabah el-Saqari says she wants to increase female participation in politics and even defends a woman's right to run for president, a stance her organization rejects.

But liberals who fear Islamist rule will set back women's rights say her candidacy is just an attempt by the Brotherhood to improve its image.

A 22-year veteran of the Brotherhood, al-Saqari is running to become chairman of the Freedom and Justice Party, which the Brotherhood set up after the fall of autocratic leader Hosni Mubarak in February last year. The party has become the vehicle through which the Brotherhood — banned and oppressed for decades under Mubarak — has rode to power, triumphing over the activists and progressive forces that led the revolution.

The internal party election, scheduled for Oct. 19, is to replace Mohammed Morsi, who held the chairman post until he took office in late June as Egypt's first freely elected president.

Al-Saqari's candidacy is largely symbolic. She is seen as having no chance to win in the face of two heavyweight candidates competing for the post — senior Brotherhood figures Essam el-Erian and Saad el-Katatni. A lesser known party member, Khaled Awda, is also running.

But the move is an unprecedented bid for a woman to enter the entirely male halls of power in the Brotherhood. The party did have female lawmakers in the first parliament formed after the revolution — which has since been dissolved — but men have completely monopolized the decision-making bodies and leadership posts of the party and the Brotherhood itself.

Liberals are not impressed, calling her candidacy a cynical attempt by the Brotherhood to promote a misleading view of its stance on women.

"They are still using women as decor," said Nehad Abou-Qomsan, head of the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights.

The Brotherhood contends that it supports women's participation in politics, business and other parts of public life. But it also advocates a strongly traditional role for women as mothers and wives, and contends that equality cannot undermine that role or contradict Islamic Shariah law.

Islamists are currently in a fierce political battle with liberal and secular forces in post-revolutionary Egypt, particularly over a new constitution. The Brotherhood and more conservative Islamists hold a majority on the assembly that is writing the charter, and liberals say they have been trying to introduce measures that would open the door for implementing a strict version of Islamic law and restrictions on women's rights.

In an interview with Associated Press, al-Saqari echoed the Brotherhood's conservative views, saying that Shariah laws are the top parameter. She argued that she can't call for a law banning female genital circumcision or limiting the marriage age for girls to prevent child marriage.

But she insisted women have a right to run for president. The Brotherhood long said a woman or Christian could not be head of state in Muslim-majority Egypt, but since Mubarak's fall it has softened that stance somewhat, saying it would not seek to write such a ban into law though it would not itself support a woman or Christian president.

"I want to see more political participation by women," said al-Saqari, a 49-year-old pharmacist who like most Egyptian Muslim women wears the conservative headscarf. "I have political rights and I want to use (them)."

"There is a political culture in Egypt that doesn't accept women as presidents, but I have the right to run for presidency."

Other prominent women in the Brotherhood have raised controversy recently with statements encouraging female genital mutilation, known as "circumcision" in Egypt, where it remains widespread despite attempts under Mubarak's regime to curtail it. Some Egyptian religious conservatives say it is required by Islam, though the majority of the Muslim world does not practice it.

Asked about the practice, al-Saqari avoided a direct response but said it and the issue of child

marriage could not be dealt with through legislation.

"We leave it to the doctor to decide whether this girl needs FGM or not. I am not the one to decide, laws won't work," she said. "The way here is not through laws but through awareness," she said, concerning laws setting a minimum age for marriage. Egyptian law currently sets a minimum age of 18, but some ultraconservatives have argued that Islam allows girls to marry as young as puberty and that the law must allow it.

Bahy Eddin Hassan, director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights, said al-Saqari's candidacy "is totally contradictory to the genuine beliefs of the Muslim Brotherhood on the role of women ... They don't believe that women and men are equal and that they should be treated on equal footing--in the constitution, in any laws."

"The Muslim Brotherhood is very concerned with its image with the West, but not with the Egyptian people," he said. "They are doing their best to market themselves to the West and this is their most recent means of doing so."

Brotherhood spokesman Mahmoud Ghozlan dismissed the criticism, saying her candidacy shows the group promotes women.

"They say that the Muslim Brotherhood does not encourage women to participate in politics. And when women do participate in our party, (the activists) criticize us," he said. "We are at a loss, what should we do? We cannot please them."

Hilmi el-Gazzar, a senior Brotherhood member, said al-Saqari faces a tough race, pointing to her inexperience in comparison to el-Katatni and el-Erian, who have served as head of parliament and interim head of the party, respectively. But her "candidacy is encouraging because it indicates the direction of our party. We are ready to have her as a candidate, and if she wins the elections, we will be ready for her to be our chair."

But "if she does not succeed in this race she will profit from the experience in the near future," he said. He said he encourages her to become a member of the party's executive office.

The new chairman will be elected by the Freedom and Justice Party's 1,000-member General Assembly. Party spokesman were unsure how many women are on the assembly, but said they are fewer than 100.

AP writer Maggie Michael in Cairo contributed to this report.

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Egypt Leader Pledges To Ease Up On Sinai Crackdown

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Ashraf Sweilam, Associated Press

EL-ARISH, Egypt (AP) — Egypt's new Islamist president on Friday pledged to ease up on the crackdown in the country's restive Sinai Peninsula and not pursue hundreds of fugitives from the lawless region that has seen a surge in militancy and cross-border attacks on Israel.

Mohammed Morsi's comments came during a visit to the northern Sinai city of el-Arish, where he prayed at its main mosque and met with tribal leaders and top ultraconservative Salafi clerics. He also met with Christian families who were lately forced to leave their homes in the area after getting death threats from Islamic militants.

Troops were on high alert, deployed at entrances and exits of the city as Morsi gave a speech, assuring tribal elders that "sons of Sinai" will not be pursued and that the judiciary would review many of the cases from the region.

"The era of blackmailing, abuse and discrimination among Egyptians is over and will not come back," he said.

Extremist militants operate in disparate groups in Sinai and are believed to have grown in numbers since last year's political upheaval following the ouster of autocratic President Hosni Mubarak, Morsi's predecessor.

The surge in militancy has largely been due to a security vacuum in the aftermath of the popular uprising that toppled Mubarak and heavy weapons smuggled from Libya across the desert to Sinai, which links Egypt's borders with the Gaza Strip and Israel.

In a brazen attack, unidentified militants killed 16 Egyptian soldiers near the border in August and last month, heavily armed militants wearing explosive belts opened fire on Israeli soldiers near the border, killing one.

Under Mubarak, Sinai's largely nomadic Bedouin population was long neglected and discriminated against. As a result, the region became a hub of weapons, drugs and human trafficking. Cities and towns bordering Israel and Gaza live off smuggling across borders and underground tunnels.

Mubarak's regime often rounded up hundreds of Sinai young men, held them without charges or sentenced them before military tribunals, delivering swift and harsh verdicts.

Morsi, who hails from the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood whose members have been routinely rounded up and tried under Mubarak, has sought to reverse the perception of security sweeps, police torture and abuse by the authorities — even as he launched military operations to hunt down perpetrators of the August attack.

"A decision has been taken to review cases of those (from Sinai) who were tried in absentia," he said during Friday's visit.

He also hinted that death penalties against 14 members of an extremists group from Sinai may be waived or reduced.

"I have not signed a single death sentence since I assumed power," Morsi said.

The 14 were convicted for a June 2011 attack against el-Arish's main police station and a nearby bank that killed a civilian and a number of police and military officers. The group was also found guilty of storming el-Arish's police station and of smashing statues of former President Anwar Sadat who was assassinated in 1981 after signing Egypt's peace treaty with Israel.

Since his election in late June, Morsi has ordered the release of dozens of top Islamic militant leaders sentenced to life imprisonment or given death sentences on terrorism-related charges, including those convicted of assassination attempts against Mubarak.

Some Sinai clerics who met with Morsi on Friday were skeptical of his promises.

"The president has made many promises now and before as well, but so far we have seen nothing," said Abu Faisal, one of the region's leading Islamists.

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Defiant Message Amid Iran Currency Crisis

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Rick Gladstone

Senior Iranian clerics intensified their anti-Western criticism on Friday, calling the near-collapse of the national currency this past week a consequence of an American-led conspiracy to wage an economic

war on Iran, and predicting that the pressure would ease.

The message, highlighted in the main weekly sermon at Friday Prayer, appeared to be an effort to show a unified and defiant response to the crisis over the currency, the rial, which lost roughly 40 percent of its value against the dollar in a stampede of selling to black-market currency traders by Iranians worried about their country's economic stability.

A televised plea on Tuesday by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to stop the selling seemed only to heighten the anxiety, and a crackdown by the police against the currency traders and the arrests of suspected speculators on Wednesday escalated into a large protest in Tehran that included merchants in the politically powerful Grand Bazaar.

That was the first significant demonstration of anger over the devalued rial, which has injected new uncertainty into the daily lives of Iranians by worsening the already high inflation rate. Many Iranians and outside economic experts have attributed the problems to what they call Mr. Ahmadinejad's mismanagement as well as the accumulating effects of the Western sanctions imposed on Iran over its disputed nuclear energy program.

None of the statements about the crisis in the official Iranian news media on Friday offered a hint of any new solutions to the crisis or suggested that the government was willing to compromise on the nuclear program in exchange for reduced sanctions.

Instead they exhorted Iranians to show fortitude and uphold the legacy of resilience amid other crises, like the eight-year war with Iraq in the 1980s.

"The pressure today imposed on us by the world arrogance is full-fledged economic war," Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, a top cleric and the Friday Prayer leader, said in his message, carried on official news outlets. "This pressure will not last. Our people have been tested, and they will not be worn down."

The Fars News Agency quoted a close aide of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as saying that Iran's enemies were mistaken if they believed the sanctions would force Iran to capitulate in the dispute over the nuclear program, which Iran has said is for peaceful purposes. Western powers, however, suspect Iran is developing the ability to make nuclear weapons.

"Iran is overcoming the psychological war and conspiracy that the enemy has brought to the currency and gold market, and this war is constantly fluctuating," said the aide, Gholam Ali Haddad Adel. "The arrogant powers, in their crude way, think that the nation of Iran is ready to let go of the Islamic Revolution through economic pressure, but we are establishing Iran's economic strength."

The message of defiance came as Western officials were contemplating further tightening the sanctions, which have severely limited Iran's ability to sell oil and have expelled Iranian banks from a global network that is crucial in conducting financial transactions.

Proponents of stricter economic penalties against Iran have been emboldened by the currency crisis, calling it evidence that the sanctions are working.

Mark D. Wallace, chief executive of United Against Nuclear Iran, a New York-based group that has worked to persuade multinational companies to sever business ties with Iran, said that by its calculation Iran's currency had fallen by 80 percent in the past year.

In a statement on the group's Web site, he called for an economic blockade on Iran to increase the pressure, saying "the regime must be forced to choose between having a nuclear weapon or a functioning economy."

Amid Protests In Iran, A New Tone In Israel Saturday, October 6, 2012

Washington Post

By Karin Brulliard

JERUSALEM — As unrest over rising prices flares in Tehran, Israeli officials are urging additional sanctions against Iran and tempering for now suggestions of a possible Israeli military strike on Iranian nuclear sites this fall.

Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman told a radio interviewer Thursday that he believed the economic crisis in Iran could spark a "Persian Spring," and he encouraged the West to aid the Iranian opposition. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has often questioned the efficacy of sanctions, is planning to meet with several European leaders and press them to stiffen their punitive measures, according to an adviser in his office.

"We are closer now probably than we've ever been" to convincing Iran to alter its nuclear policies, an Israeli government official said, adding that still tougher sanctions are needed because

"Iran will not adapt unless you put a new level on."

The adviser and the official spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the issue publicly.

Last week, in a speech to the U.N. General Assembly, Netanyahu emphasized the need to set a "red line" for military action against Iran before it enriches enough uranium to build a bomb. But he suggested that Iran would not reach that point until well into 2013, which many analysts said meant an Israeli strike is unlikely this year.

The speech capped weeks of escalating tensions between U.S. officials and Netanyahu over his demands for such an ultimatum from the Obama administration, a stance that had sparked criticism in both countries that he was interfering in the U.S. election.

The apparent shift in tone in Israel has eased those strains and reduced pressure on the Obama administration in the remaining weeks of the campaign. Some Israeli analysts said Netanyahu realized that he could not afford a public rift with Israel's most important ally and with an American president who polls suggest is likely to be reelected.

The Tehran protests over price hikes and the devaluation of the Iranian rial, which analysts attribute to both tough international sanctions and domestic policies, have also played a role, said Meir Javedanfar, who teaches Iranian politics at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya.

"Until now, Netanyahu has said, 'Sanctions are not working, so we must consider the military option.' He can't say that anymore," Javedanfar said. "What's happening with the rial is far more dangerous to the Iranian regime than Stuxnet," he added, referring to a cyberattack on Iran's nuclear program, which U.S. officials have said was a collaboration between Israeli and American experts.

This week, Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz said the Iranian economy was "on the verge of collapse." Moshe Yaalon, another top cabinet minister, called for harsher sanctions, which he said must be paired with a credible military threat to form an "integrated strategy" to pressure Iran. Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

Netanyahu plans to press for additional European sanctions when the Italian prime minister visits Israel later this month, and again during a trip to

Germany and possibly other European countries in December, the Netanyahu adviser said.

"The economic sanctions on the regime in Tehran are having an effect on the Iranian economy — all the data points in that direction," the adviser said. "But the point in the sanctions are not the sanctions themselves. The point of the sanctions are to get them to slow down their nuclear program."

Israeli officials say the emphasis on sanctions does not represent a shift in policy. It is instead one phase of a strategy of applying unrelenting and intensifying pressure on various "pressure vectors," including the threat of military action, in the belief that Iran will seek to exploit any softening by the international community, the government official said.

If Europe toughens sanctions, it could prompt other countries to do the same, the official said.

"When it looked like the sanctions were getting a lot better — and they have gotten a lot better since the beginning of 2012 — Netanyahu was emphasizing this other lever, the red line. . . . He's now shifted to talking about sanctions," said Emily Landau, an Iran expert at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv. "Iran still hasn't come to the conclusion that it might be better to negotiate, although it looks like we might be getting to that point."

Opinion surveys indicate most Israelis oppose attacking Iran without the backing of the United States, and many experts say Israel would not do so without coordinating with its American allies.

Adding to the sense that an Israeli attack is unlikely this year were reports this week of an explosive split between Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, political rivals who have spearheaded Israel's aggressive stance against Iran.

Now, amid speculation that Netanyahu is likely to call an early election, perhaps in February, the news here is dominated by reports of backbiting and sniping between allies of the two.

Netanyahu, in one television report, was quoted accusing Barak — who publicly distanced himself from Netanyahu's red-line demand — of undermining the prime minister during a recent U.S. trip.

Netanyahu heads the hawkish Likud party, which is expected to win the next elections. Barak leads the small centrist Independence party.

Netanyahu's office declined to comment on the apparent rift. Barak's office released a statement saying he has worked at strengthening relations and "lowering tensions" with the United States.

Some analysts said Barak is seeking to differentiate himself from Netanyahu to appeal to voters but that they differ little on the Iran threat.

"On the Iranian thing — on the bomb, on the red lines — both have said that there's actually no space between them," said Zalman Shoval, a Netanyahu adviser and former ambassador to the United States. Of the dispute, Shoval said: "That's Israeli politics."

Signs Growing That Israeli PM Will Call Early Vote

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Aron Heller, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Signs are growing that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will call parliamentary elections as early as February, months ahead of schedule in a bid to capitalize on a wave of popularity and a fragmented opposition to guarantee his hold on power for several more years.

While Netanyahu has not made any formal announcement, several members of his coalition, including his foreign minister and the speaker of parliament, have signaled that elections are imminent. An official decision could come in the next week or two as parliament opens its fall session, with February the likely date of the vote.

Netanyahu has presided over a relatively stable period. Re-election could give him a fresh mandate to continue his tough stance toward Iran's suspect nuclear program, put the already deadlocked peace process with the Palestinians further into deep freeze and further complicate relations with the U.S. if President Barack Obama is re-elected.

Elections are currently scheduled a year from now. But Israeli coalition governments rarely last their full terms, and Netanyahu appears to have concluded that now is the time to strike.

The immediate reason is the difficulty in passing the annual budget. If a budget isn't approved by Dec. 31, he would be required to order a new vote. In a challenging economic climate, experts say the next budget will require deep cuts to social programs favored by his coalition partners.

But Netanyahu may have deeper motivations as well. After presiding over a remarkably stable

coalition for nearly four years, he has little incentive to wait a few extra months when the stars seem so well aligned for him to win re-election.

"Think of a stock: His is high now and he wants to sell before it drops," said veteran political analyst Hanan Crystal. "Bibi has no real challengers. The gold medal has already been decided. Now the fight is over silver," he added, using Netanyahu's nickname.

Opinion polls put Netanyahu's Likud Party far ahead of all rivals, his coalition partners are vulnerable, the opposition is fractured and leaderless, and the only truly viable candidate to replace him, former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, is entangled in a legal battle that will keep him on the sidelines for the coming months.

In addition, Netanyahu appears to have defused a crisis with the United States over Iran's nuclear program. The U.S., Israel and allies accuse Tehran of trying to develop atomic weapons, but Iran denies the charge, saying its program is for peaceful purposes only.

In a speech to the United Nations last week, Netanyahu backed away from threats to attack Iran, signaling that the world has until next summer to curb Tehran's nuclear program. He had been under heavy U.S. pressure to halt his calls for military threats.

Crystal said re-election would give Netanyahu a valuable vote of confidence in case Obama gets re-elected. Many have speculated that Obama may seek payback for what is perceived as Netanyahu's preference for Obama's Republican challenger Mitt Romney, an old friend and ideological comrade.

Early this week, Netanyahu held out the prospect of elections when his office announced he would meet with coalition partners to discuss the budget. Since then, it has appeared increasingly likely that he will call a vote.

In perhaps the strongest sign that elections are near, Netanyahu has had a high-profile falling out in recent days with his closest ally, Defense Minister Ehud Barak. Netanyahu's office has accused Barak of trying to undermine him in discussions with American officials. Netanyahu was especially upset when Barak met Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel, a close friend of Obama, during a recent trip to the U.S. without telling the prime minister. Barak has said he did nothing wrong, and has presented himself as a moderating force who has repeatedly smoothed over relations

with the Americans throughout Netanyahu's tenure.

"Even if the elections are not yet here, the election atmosphere is here," said Nahum Barnea, a leading columnist for Yediot Ahronot. "It exists in the insults that the senior ministers exchange, and in the fact that they have turned their attention from state affairs to primary affairs."

Barak leads the small, centrist "Independence" Party, one of the few moderate elements in a coalition dominated by nationalist and religious parties. A former prime minister and military chief, Barak is well-respected internationally.

During any campaign, opponents are likely to seize upon Netanyahu's rocky relationship with Obama. The U.S. is Israel's closest and most important ally. Netanyahu could also come under fire for his failure to advance peace talks with the Palestinians; massive street protests last summer against the growing gap between rich and poor, and widespread resentment over attempts by ultra-Orthodox parties to impose their ways on general society. A committee formed by Netanyahu to end a controversial system of draft deferments for ultra-Orthodox men failed in spectacular fashion, breeding even more anger toward religious parties.

Despite these shortcomings, Netanyahu remains popular in opinion polls, thanks to a lengthy period of quiet, a resilient economy and his handling of the Iran issue. He has no serious rivals who could defeat him.

There are plenty of contenders for second fiddle, beginning with the rejuvenated Labor Party and its leader, former journalist Shelly Yachimovich. She is hoping to capitalize on the social protests by focusing on jobs and the economy.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman hopes his ultranationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party makes gains in the elections.

The decimated Kadima Party is also in the mix, but barely. Currently the largest party in parliament, it has slipped badly in the polls under new leader Shaul Mofaz.

Then there's the biggest wild card of all: political newcomer Yair Lapid, a former TV anchorman who has launched a new party catering to Israel's silent majority of disgruntled middle class.

According to a survey in the Haaretz newspaper last week, if elections were held now, Netanyahu's Likud Party would win 28 seats in the 120-

member parliament, putting him far ahead of any other party.

Netanyahu is also deemed most suitable to be prime minister with 35 percent support. Yachimovich lagged far behind at 16 percent.

In order to be prime minister, Netanyahu would then have to put together a coalition with 61 members.

According to the poll, Netanyahu could form another government with the Jewish religious and nationalist parties currently in his coalition. The poll indicated that dovish and Arab parties now in the opposition would likely remain a minority. The poll surveyed 507 people and had a margin of error of 4.2 percentage points.

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New Clashes At Site In Jerusalem Holy To Both Muslims And Jews

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Jodi Rudoren

JERUSALEM — Two Israeli police officers were slightly injured in a clash at a holy site in Jerusalem that erupted during a demonstration after Friday Prayer, and one Arab protester was arrested.

The protest occurred several days after a Jewish hard-liner was accused of breaking the ban against Jews praying at the fiercely contested site, called the Temple Mount by Jews and the Noble Sanctuary by Muslims.

Hundreds of Muslims emerged from Al Aksa Mosque on Friday chanting slogans against Jewish extremists and throwing stones at police officers, according to witnesses and the authorities. Micky Rosenfeld, a police spokesman, said officers "dispersed the rioters with stun grenades," though journalists on the scene said tear gas was also deployed.

Mr. Rosenfeld said that one man, an Arab citizen of Israel, was arrested on suspicion of attempting to stab a police officer, and that the police expected to make further "arrests in the coming days of those who were involved in the disturbances."

Religious Jews revere the site as the location of their ancient temples; for Muslims, it is the third holiest site in the world. The second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, was set off in 2000 by a visit

to the site by Ariel Sharon, then the Likud Party leader.

Since Israel captured East Jerusalem during the 1967 war, the compound has been operated by the Waqf, the Muslim religious endowment, with security provided by Israel. Jews are allowed to visit the site, except on Fridays, but not to pray there.

The friction on Friday appears to have been tied a visit there on Tuesday by about 500 Jews. During that visit, Moshe Feiglin, a right-wing activist who frequently visits the site, was arrested after he laid on the ground, against police orders, Mr. Rosenfeld said.

On Wednesday, five Israeli Arabs were arrested on suspicion of attempting to attack visiting Jews, Mr. Rosenfeld said; one Jew was also arrested that day for not following police orders to leave as the Arabs approached.

Khaled Abu Aker and Isabel Kershner contributed reporting.

Israel Police Disperse Palestinians At Holy Site

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli police have stormed a holy site in Jerusalem's Old City, dispersing dozens of Palestinians who police say lobbed rocks at officers.

Friday's clash occurred at a compound containing the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites. Jews call the compound the Temple Mount because of the biblical Jewish temples that once stood there.

Israeli police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said Palestinian protestors threw rocks at police stationed at the compound entrance. The police stormed inside and used stun grenades to disperse the rioters.

Earlier this week, hardline Jewish activists were arrested for trying to pray atop the mount. An aide to the Palestinian president said Friday's protest was because of that visit.

Police prevent Jewish prayers on the mount to avoid clashes with Muslims.

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New York Man Kills Cook At Israeli Hotel, Then Is Shot By Police

Friday, October 5, 2012

New York Times

By Jodi Rudoren

A New York man opened fire in the dining room of a hotel in the southern Israeli resort of Eilat on Friday and killed a kitchen worker before being shot dead by police officers, the authorities said. The gunman, William Hershkovitz, was born in 1989, and had just been fired after working at the hotel for a couple of weeks through Oranim, a company that provides tourists with internships in the industry, a company official told The Associated Press.

Eitan Gedasi, deputy police commander of Eilat, told Israel Radio that a call came in about a shooting at the hotel, the Leonardo Club, around 9 a.m. after the man grabbed a pistol from a hotel security guard.

"The man surprised the security guard and threw him on the ground," Mr. Gedasi said. "A civilian who saw this tried to help, but the man managed to get away with the weapon towards the kitchen."

Ofer Gutman, head of the Oranim program, told The A.P. that the man had been fired from the hotel on Tuesday and was waiting to be reassigned to another workplace; he did not give a reason for the firing. Mr. Gutman said the attacker had arrived in Israel about two months ago. Hotel officials declined to be interviewed.

"He was a normal guy," Mr. Gutman was quoted as saying. "There was nothing that indicated what would happen in the end."

Micky Rosenfeld, an Israeli police spokesman, said the man, who was not identified pending notification of his family, fired several shots in the dining area before storming into the kitchen, where he killed a cook, who also was not identified by the authorities. The shots fired in the dining room did not strike anyone, they said.

The gunman then "barricaded himself in the kitchen," raising police fears of a hostage situation. About 10:15 a.m., antiterror units from the Israeli Defense Forces "moved in on the suspect, and he opened fire again," Mr. Rosenfeld said.

It turned out that no hostages had been taken, Mr. Rosenfeld said, making it seem more like a workplace dispute than a terrorist attack, but the circumstances were still being investigated. Two women were treated for shock afterward, he added.

The police officials said the man was from New York State and was in Israel as part of a program offered by Oranim, an educational tourism provider sponsored in part by the Jewish Agency for Israel. Under the program, people ages 20 to 35 live and work in Eilat hotels for five months while taking a university course in hospitality.

The shooting occurred during the holiday of Sukkot, when Israeli schools and many offices are closed. It is one of the busiest weeks of the year in Eilat, and the 282-room Leonardo Club, which caters to families with all-inclusive packages and a water park, was fully booked.

Guests at the hotel told Israeli radio and television stations that after the assailant argued with a security guard in the lobby and took his weapon, they hid behind a sofa. One guest, Aviram Sela, said he tried to wrestle the man to the ground before he started firing.

Another, Meil Gilad, told Israel Radio: "I saw a crowd of people and security guards yelling, 'There is a shooter!'. Suddenly I saw a man with a baseball bat run towards the kitchen, and then I heard one shot fired."

Hotel workers and the police told guests to return to their rooms and lock the doors. Once told that it was safe to come out, people emerged "happy, clapping," another guest, Michal Bouaron, told Israel's Channel 2.

"We won't let this ruin our day and our vacation," she added.

Irit Pazner Garshowitz contributed reporting.

Israeli Police: American Kills Chef At Hotel

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Daniel Estrin, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — An American man who lost his job at a Red Sea hotel in Israel shot dead a chef at the resort on Friday, then was killed himself in a shootout with Israeli commandos, police said.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld identified the suspect as William Herskovitz, 23, of Poughkeepsie, New York, and said his family in the United States had been notified.

The motive for the attack in the resort city of Eilat was still under investigation, police said. But the head of the Oranim work and study program said it occurred days after Herskovitz lost his job at the Leonardo Club Hotel.

The attacker entered the hotel on Friday, snatched a gun from a hotel security guard and fired several shots, killing the chef, Rosenfeld said.

Police and army anti-terror units then surrounded the building and told guests to stay in their rooms. The gunman shot at special forces as they entered the hotel, prompting them to return fire and kill him, Rosenfeld said.

Family members, meanwhile, mourned the death of the chef, Abed Armando, 33 in an Arab village in northern Israel. They told Channel 2 TV that he was in Eilat because he wanted to work as a chef.

Herskovitz arrived in Israel about two months ago to participate in the Oranim program, which combines Hebrew study, travel and work at the hotel with a university course on hotel management.

Yuval Arad, a program spokesman, said instructors met with Herskovitz on Thursday following complaints by the hotel staff.

"It was decided ... that he will leave the project and return on Tuesday to the U.S.," Arad said in a statement, without elaborating.

Ofer Gutman, head of the Oranim program, which is sponsored partially by the Israeli government, said earlier that it was a mutual decision to remove Herskovitz from his job at the hotel, and the program was planning to reassign him to another workplace.

Gutman did not give details about the reasons behind the termination but said participants sometimes transfer to other workplaces based on their personal preferences.

Speaking in a telephone interview before boarding a flight to Eilat, he described Herskovitz as "a normal guy" and said "there was nothing that indicated what would happen in the end."

Neither he nor Arad could be reached for further comment.

Rabbi Yacov Borenstein, Herskovitz's rabbi in New York, said Herskovitz was eager to be in Israel to reconnect with his faith and study Judaism.

"It's terrible and shocking news," Borenstein told the Poughkeepsie Journal. "He was excited to go to Israel, but unfortunately it didn't turn out very well."

Oranim program participant Stas Abramovich, 27, said a number of people had complained about Herskovitz to the program coordinator.

"There was something strange in his smile, but I never saw him as aggressive," Abramovich said.

Another participant, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was afraid of repercussions from the program, said Hershkovitz had issued death threats to other members, but program coordinators ignored repeated complaints.

"He would talk to himself, share dreams that he'd had about random killings and mutilations that he did, he would have statements against Arabs or Nazis or terrorist type movements," the participant added.

Michal Bouaron, a guest at the hotel, told Channel 2 that police ordered guests to stay in their rooms during the incident. Later, police announced that it was safe for guests to leave their rooms.

"There was a lot of tension," Bouaron said. "Life goes on ... We won't let this ruin our day and our vacation."

The hotel was fully booked, Israeli media reported, because of the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, when many Israelis take vacations. Eilat, with attractive Red Sea beaches and hot, dry weather, is a favorite getaway spot.

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Political And Market Forces Hobble Israel's Pack Of Ink-Stained Watchdogs

Friday, October 5, 2012

New York Times

By Isabel Kershner

JERUSALEM — The mainstream newspaper Maariv is on the verge of closing, apparently having lost a fierce 64-year contest against the populist Hebrew tabloid Yediot Aharonot. On Thursday, Haaretz, the flagship broadsheet of Israel's left-wing intelligentsia, was not published for the first time in three decades; the newsroom held a one-day strike to protest the planned layoff of scores of employees.

Israel's print media are in crisis, squeezed by both the global pressures of the digital age and a small, crowded Hebrew-language market that is undergoing convulsions of its own. Channel 10, one of Israel's two commercial television stations, also hangs precariously, waiting to be salvaged either by the government or by investment from abroad.

Media experts here speak of an ominous trend: a once-diverse news bazaar that is becoming more

concentrated and prone to political influence. In particular, they say, the economics of the print media have been skewed by the arrival five years ago of Israel Hayom, a free national newspaper owned by Sheldon Adelson, a conservative American billionaire who is a staunch supporter of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel Hayom, viewed as pro-Netanyahu, now claims the widest distribution of any Hebrew newspaper on weekdays. Public television and radio have also come under tighter state control.

While newspapers worldwide are struggling, in the small market of Israel, with its population of nearly eight million Hebrew, Arabic and Russian speakers, the threat seems magnified. Given its size, Israel has a relatively large number of media outlets, said Tehilla Shwartz Altshuler, who leads the Media Reform Project at the Israel Democracy Institute, an independent research center. That intensifies the competition among newspapers for readers and advertising, and Israel Hayom, with Mr. Adelson's backing, has been able to take over a larger share of the market.

The advent of Israel Hayom, Ms. Shwartz Altshuler added, has accelerated a situation "that would have happened anyway."

The narrowing of the media marketplace may please some conservatives in Mr. Netanyahu's government. Yuval Steinitz, the finance minister, was recently recorded at a closed meeting of his Likud Party activists saying that while "media is important in a democracy," the Israeli media for the most part favor the left over Likud.

"Beyond that," he continued, "the media has lost its respect for one small, simple word: 'truth.' There is no more respect for the word truth."

Tzipi Livni, the former leader of the opposition, came to the media's defense in a recent column for Maariv. "I am sure that some politicians feel more secure with a shrinking number of media outlets and the fact that there are journalists now in need of the government's help."

She continued, "I prefer a number of watchdogs, some of which make mistakes sometimes, or neglect their duty or bark too loudly, over one loyal dog who speaks in one voice — his master's voice."

The management of Maariv is now in the hands of court-appointed trustees after its owner could no longer afford to cover its losses. A sale is pending to Shlomo Ben-Zvi, an Israeli who publishes a right-leaning newspaper called Makor Rishon.

But even if the sale to Mr. Ben-Zvi goes through, he has said he will retain only about 300 of Maariv's 2,000 employees, to keep Maariv's Web site going and perhaps publish the newspaper in a limited format. That means that 1,700 journalists, administrative staff members and print workers will probably be out of a job.

"It is like a sausage merchant who buys a horse and tells him about all the wonderful trips that await him," said Zvi Reich, a former editor at Yediot Aharonot and now in the communications department of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. "It will be brutal."

Aware that the company does not have the money to pay all their compensation and pensions, Maariv employees have staged protests in the streets of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

This week, Amos Schocken, the publisher of Haaretz, raised the specter of closing the newspaper if his employees could not adapt to the new, starker business reality.

Analysts said Maariv had been suffering from financial decline and bad management for up to 15 years and had lost its identity the more it tried to mimic Yediot Aharonot, which caters to the middlebrow reader.

Haaretz, however, fills a distinctive niche. Though its circulation is small, its impact is broad.

"Israel without Haaretz would be like Israel without the Supreme Court," said Uzi Benziman, a former Haaretz columnist and now editor of The Seventh Eye, an online journal dealing with Israeli media issues.

"It is not surprising that Maariv is the first to go," he said. "I'm not sure it will be the last."

Still, for many here, the demise of Maariv would leave a hole in the country's history. The newspaper was founded in 1948, the year Israel became a state, by disgruntled journalists at Yediot Aharonot (Latest News), the leading Hebrew newspaper at the time, who walked out in a dispute over work conditions and journalistic principles. The new paper, originally called Yediot Maariv (Evening News), soon became known simply as Maariv.

In its first two decades, Maariv was regarded as the most widely read newspaper in Israel and the most connected with the political, economic and social elite. The decline began in the 1970s, according to Rafi Mann, who worked at the newspaper for nearly 30 years and now teaches journalism at the Ariel University Center in the

West Bank and at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Then, Mr. Mann said, the editors of Yediot Aharonot "understood the social revolution taking place in Israel," along with the rise of Menachem Begin's Likud Party, which spoke for a public that saw itself as the underdog.

But Maariv, he added, "did not read the social map of Israel well."

Though Maariv has continued to break some important stories, its prominent editors and columnists, like the satirist Ephraim Kishon, belong mainly in the past.

"In the last few years," Mr. Mann said, "both advertisers and the public have been asking, 'What is the branding of Maariv?'"

Al-Qaida Claims Attack Wave And Jailbreak In Iraq

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Sameer N. Yacoub, Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Al-Qaida's branch in Iraq claimed responsibility on Friday for a stunning jailbreak last week that was followed by a wave of deadly attacks across the country that left 26 dead.

In a statement posted on a militant website, the Islamic State of Iraq said the attacks, mostly bombings using explosive-rigged parked cars, were launched against "carefully selected targets" in Baghdad and some other provinces.

The group, also called the Islamic State of Iraq, has said that both the freeing of its prisoners and the assassination of officials are top priorities, part of a general offensive intended to retake Sunni towns and districts that were once al-Qaida strongholds.

Last Sunday's coordinated blasts, stretching from the northern city of Kirkuk through Baghdad to Iraq's Shiite-dominated south, mostly targeted Shiite neighborhoods and Iraqi security forces. In all, at least 26 people died.

In Friday's statement, the al-Qaida-linked group said these attacks were in response to "atrocities committed by the Shiite government against the Sunni prisoners."

The militant group also claimed responsibility for a Sept. 27 prison break in Saddam Hussein's hometown, in which prisoners seized weapons and clashed with security forces in an hours-long

standoff. Twelve people died and dozens of al-Qaida inmates escaped.

"The tight security measures did not prevent the fighters of the Islamic State from carrying out this operation with the maximum accuracy," the statement said.

Also on Friday, police said that a twin bombing in southeast Baghdad killed five people, including four Shiite worshippers. The blasts hit the al-Sadrein mosque and a nearby police checkpoint as prayers ended in the mostly Shiite neighborhood of Zafaraniyah.

They say at least 26 worshippers were wounded.

A medical official in a nearby hospital confirmed the casualty figures. All officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to talk to the media.

Violence has dropped in Iraq since the height of the insurgency a few years ago but militants still launch deadly attacks against security forces and Shiites in an attempt to undermine the Shiite-led government.

Earlier this summer, the Islamic State announced a campaign dubbed "Breaking the Walls" that aimed to restore its power in areas from which it was driven by the American military and Sunni fighters of the U.S.-allied Sahwa or Awakening movement after sectarian fighting peaked in 2007.

Al-Qaida in Iraq has for years had a hot-and-cold relationship with the global terror network's leadership. Both shared the goal of targeting the U.S. military in Iraq and, to an extent, undermining the Shiite government that replaced Saddam Hussein's regime. But al-Qaida leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahri distanced themselves from the Iraqi militants in 2007 for having killed Iraqi civilians instead of focusing on Western targets.

Associated Press Writer Qassim Abdul-Zahra contributed to this report.

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Double Bombing Near Shiite Mosque Kills 5 In Iraq

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Sameer N. Yacoub, Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraqi officials say a double bombing near a Shiite mosque in Baghdad has killed five people, including four worshippers.

Police say that the bombs went off outside the al-Sadrein mosque and at a nearby police checkpoint as Friday noon prayers ended in the mostly Shiite neighborhood of Zafaraniyah in southeastern Baghdad.

They say at least 26 worshippers were wounded.

A medical official in a nearby hospital confirms the casualty figures. All officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to talk to the media.

Violence has dropped in Iraq since the height of the insurgency a few years ago but militants still launch deadly attacks against security forces and Shiites in an attempt to undermine the Shiite-led government.

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Islamist-led Protesters In Jordan Press For Broader, Swifter Reforms

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Washington Post

By Taylor Luck

AMMAN, Jordan — Thousands of Jordanians joined an Islamist-led demonstration in the capital Friday to demand that King Abdullah II implement democratic reforms, in the largest of a wave of protests launched since last year's Arab Spring.

Several thousand people, including some liberal activists and tribal representatives, took to downtown streets after Friday prayers to accuse the Jordanian monarch of having failed to carry out promised reforms — among them the election of a parliament empowered to appoint the government, which the king now chooses.

"Abdullah," the protesters chanted. "Where are our freedoms? We want to reform the constitution before the people revolt."

Friday's show of force came a day after Abdullah dissolved the current parliament to pave the way for elections. Participants said that move was insufficient, and they described the turnout as a watershed moment for a 20-month-old protest movement that has often failed to attract more than 1,000 people to its rallies.

"We don't want elections for elections' sake. We want real change," said Fatima Hammad, a

Muslim Brotherhood supporter at the demonstration.

Abdullah has responded to simmering protests with reforms including an end to restrictions on public gatherings like the one Friday and pledges to introduce a parliamentary government eventually. But criticism is mounting that those moves have been superficial and too slow.

The Brotherhood's political party, the only organized opposition force in Jordan, is vowing to boycott polls, saying that new electoral laws favor rural tribal areas loyal to the government. Its participation is viewed as crucial to the legitimacy of an election.

"For over 20 months, the Jordanian people have had one central demand: the right to choose governments," said Zaki Bani Rsheid, the Brotherhood's deputy head. "And for over 20 months, the regime has provided nothing more than empty promises, and now we are faced with a political crisis."

Demonstrators said their frustration is growing, particularly as they witness political transformations in other Arab countries.

"Governments come and governments go, and our demands or needs are never listened to," said Omar Abu Sheid, 17, who held a placard reading, "Student for reform."

Some demonstrators complained about the impact of government austerity measures and price hikes intended to aid the struggling economy. Muath Abu Hani, a 47-year-old unemployed carpenter, blamed corruption for Jordan's fiscal woes.

"For over a decade, officials have stolen billions from the treasury, and now we are expected to pay the bill," he said. "This is why the only solution is to reform the regime."

So far, the protest movement and increasingly open criticism of the king have not amounted to a real threat to Abdullah. Opposition factions are divided, and they are calling for reforms, not the king's overthrow. Some Jordanians worry that the Brotherhood intends to usurp the king's powers in a bid to establish an Islamic state.

"They say, 'We want to reform the regime,' but we all know they want to form a new regime," said Ahmed Saud, who was hanging a framed portrait of Abdullah from the balcony of his downtown Amman cafe, overlooking the demonstration. "They want to take away our king and country, and the Jordanian people won't let them."

Karin Brulliard in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

Jordan's Islamists Rally For Elections Boycott Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Jamal Halaby, Associated Press

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — Thousands of Jordanians rallied on Friday to call for a boycott of upcoming legislative elections, a challenge to King Abdullah II who has promoted a parliament-centered reform process to stave off an Arab Spring uprising in his country.

The protest in downtown Amman was the largest in nearly 22 months of weekly protests in Jordan. It is meant to show that the king's critics can push for change through the streets, rather than through a legislature that critics say in its current form is too beholden to the monarchy.

The demonstration came a day after Abdullah dissolved parliament half-way through its four-year term, setting the stage for new elections. No date is set yet for the polls, but they are expected at the end of this year or early in 2013.

Jordan at present is in little danger of seeing mass upheaval, such as that which toppled regimes in Egypt and other Arab countries in 2011. Protests are usually peaceful, and well within the ability of the security forces to contain. Most in the opposition remain loyal to the king, pressing for reforms but not advocating the removal of the monarchy.

In the latest rally, Hammam Saeed of the Muslim Brotherhood group insisted on the need for an election boycott in a speech to 7,000 protesters, including fellow Islamists, leftists, and members of other movements. Police sealed off the area.

"We will not reverse our boycott of the elections," Saeed shouted. Protesters chanted, "Abdullah, listen well: We want freedom, not your royal favors."

The main point of contention is over an election law enacted three months ago, allowing each eligible voter two ballots, including one for a nationwide party list, instead of a single ballot cast for a candidate running in a district.

The party list system favors larger coalitions with an ideological agenda such as the Islamists, while the district-based system tends to return tribal pro-government candidates who muster local support from their particular clan and relatives.

The government treated the two-ballot system as a concession to the opposition. But the Brotherhood and others say that it does not go far enough, and that the elections will result in an ineffective parliament filled with palace loyalists.

"The reforms are cosmetic and will only lead to a docile parliament, like the previous successive legislatures we had," a bearded Saeed roared through a loudspeaker.

The Brotherhood insists on an older election law from 1989, which allowed Jordanians multiple ballots and saw the Brotherhood at the time win almost half of the seats.

In 1990, six Brotherhood lawmakers joined a Cabinet for the first time ever. But the group's popularity waned soon afterward as its lawmakers and Cabinet members failed to deliver on promises to create jobs and improve living conditions of the poor, focusing instead on banning alcohol aboard some flights of Jordan's flag carrier and ending TV talk shows they considered too liberal.

The Brotherhood boycotted the last two elections but remained popular among poor Jordanians who benefit from Islamic charities that aid schools, banks and hospitals in areas outside the government's reach.

Despite opposing many of the king's policies, the Brotherhood has remained largely loyal to Abdullah's dynasty, which claims ancestry to Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

Jordan has weathered 18 months of street protests calling for a wider public say in politics, partially by curtailing the absolute powers of the king. The protests have been small and mild compared to mass uprisings elsewhere in the region.

Under pressure, Abdullah changed 42 articles, or one-third of Jordan's 60-year-old constitution, giving parliament a say in forming Cabinets — a task which used to be his sole prerogative.

He also created a constitutional court to monitor the application of the law and an independent electoral commission to supervise the vote, taking over the role from the Interior Ministry.

Other moves included a political party law that encourages a multiparty system, a municipality law that allows Jordanians to govern their towns by electing mayors and city councils, and reforms allowing a teachers union to be formed for the first time ever.

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UN Removes Saudi Businessman From Blacklist

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council committee monitoring sanctions against al-Qaida removed a Saudi businessman from its blacklist Friday.

The committee chairman, Germany's U.N. Ambassador Peter Wittig, said that Yasin al-Qadi had been de-listed, following a recommendation by the blacklist's ombudsman to remove him.

Al-Qadi filed a lawsuit in 2009 in Washington, D.C. to be removed from a U.S. list of people accused of financing al-Qaida.

Al-Qadi's charitable Muwafaq foundation was identified by the U.S. Treasury department as an al-Qaida front and placed on a terror list in October 2001. Al-Qadi, 57, has denied the accusations and has said that the foundation was closed even before the hijackings.

The U.S., European Union, Switzerland and Turkey all took action against al-Qadi. Over the past several years, a team of lawyers has worked successfully to overturn the decisions against al-Qadi in Turkey and Europe.

In 2009, the Security Council established an independent ombudsman to deal with requests to get off the U.N. blacklist.

Last year, the council strengthened the role of the ombudsman, presently Canadian lawyer Kimberly Prost. If the ombudsman recommends delisting, the person or entity will be taken off the sanctions list in 60 days unless the sanctions committee agrees by consensus to maintain sanctions.

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Bahrain Police, Protesters Clash In Capital Manama

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Brian Murphy, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Riot police in Bahrain used water cannons and tear gas on Friday to disperse hundreds of anti-government

protesters trying to reach a heavily guarded site that was once the hub of their uprising.

The demonstrators marched toward Pearl Square in Bahrain's capital, Manama, after a funeral procession for a protester who died in custody. The government said the man died of a blood disease.

An Associated Press photographer said the demonstrators hurled firebombs and rocks at troops about 700 meters (yards) from Pearl Square, where crowds gathered in February 2011 as the Arab Spring-inspired uprising erupted in the Gulf nation.

Bahrain's majority Shiites seek greater rights in the Sunni-ruled kingdom, which is home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet. At least 50 people have died in nearly 20 months of unrest.

Dozens of opposition leaders have been jailed, including human rights activist Nabeel Rajab whose family said he began a hunger strike Friday.

Rajab was temporarily freed from prison this week to attend his mother's funeral, but the furlough was cut short after he delivered a speech urging for protests to continue.

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EUROPE & EURASIA

Germany's Merkel To Visit Greece Next Week Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Geir Moulson, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Angela Merkel will travel to Greece next week for the first time since the debt crisis erupted to meet the country's prime minister — who warned Friday that Athens will run out of money at the end of November if it doesn't receive the next part of its bailout loans.

Because Germany has been instrumental in pushing Greece to make austerity cuts in exchange for its bailout loans, Merkel has routinely been the object of anger at public protests in Athens. Her photograph has been manipulated by Greek newspapers to look like a Nazi officer and a prisoner at Guantanamo Bay.

Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras said Merkel's visit on Tuesday was good news. "We will receive her as befits the leader of a great power

and a friendly country," he told reporters in Athens.

But Greece's main labor unions were swift to call a protest rally outside Parliament on Tuesday against "the neoliberal policies of Mrs. Merkel and the European Union's core leadership," and a three-hour work stoppage in Athens to facilitate participation.

The unions said in a statement that "workers, pensioners and unemployed people can take no more of the European Union's punitive policies."

A populist conservative party that came fourth in Greece's June national elections said it would stage a protest outside the German Embassy in Athens on Tuesday evening.

Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, was at pains to portray the trip, her first since July 2007, as "a normal visit." It follows an invitation that Samaras made when he visited Berlin in August.

Seibert underlined Germany's message that it wants Greece to stay in the euro bloc — but that the Greeks also must push ahead with their painful reforms. Since Greece received its first bailout in May 2010, it has repeatedly slashed incomes, hiked taxes and raised retirement ages.

"We want to help Greece to stabilize itself in the eurozone. We are doing that by contributing massively to the rescue programs that are supposed to help get Greece out of the crisis," Seibert said.

"This will only be possible with major efforts on the part of the Greeks — we see that there is increased reforming zeal under the Samaras government and we want to support that."

Merkel has been noncommittal on Greece's hopes of getting more time to enact reforms and repay its loans, but has rejected talk from some in her center-right coalition about a possible Greek exit from the 17-nation euro.

Officials from the European Commission, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank — the so-called "troika" — are currently in Greece assessing the country's progress in fulfilling the terms for receiving aid.

If their report doesn't clear the way for the payment of the next €31 billion (\$40 billion) tranche of the country's bailout, Greece could be forced to default on its debts and perhaps leave the euro. It's unclear when a decision will come.

Asked in an interview with German business daily Handelsblatt how long Greece can hold out

without that payment, Samaras was quoted as saying: "Until the end of November. Then the till will be empty."

Samaras said he's confident that the money will arrive on time, though he conceded that there are difficulties in negotiations with the troika.

"The troika is demanding above all further cuts to pensions and wages. That is very difficult, because we are already bleeding," he said. "The existing cuts already go to the bone. We are at the limit of what we can expect of our population."

Greece is caught in a deep recession, and has unemployment of nearly 25 percent. On Friday, the country's statistical authority said the economic contraction in 2010 and 2011 was even worse than earlier thought. It said the economy contracted by 4.9 percent in 2010, compared to a previous estimate of 3.5 percent, and 7.1 percent in 2011, instead of 6.9 percent.

The revision is expected to push up the country's debt as a proportion of annual economic output.

The conservative Samaras leads a three-party coalition government that was put together after two elections earlier this year.

"People know that this government means Greece's last chance," the prime minister was quoted as saying. "We will make it. If we fail, chaos awaits us."

—
Derek Gatopoulos and Nicholas Paphitis in Athens contributed to this report.

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National Bank Of Greece Calls For Eurobank Merger

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — National Bank of Greece, the debt-crippled country's biggest lender by assets, on Friday announced a public offer to merge with its largest domestic competitor, Eurobank.

NBG said in a statement that the proposal called for Eurobank shareholders to receive 58 new shares for every 100 that they own. Eurobank CEO Nikolaos Nanopoulos said his bank's board would examine the proposal "in a constructive spirit."

Greek banks are under pressure to merge after experiencing severe damage from the three-year-old financial crisis and a major write-down in the country's debt earlier this year.

"Today's public offer aims to create a broader banking group in Greece that will ... stabilize the Greek banking system and provide the necessary financing to support Greece's economic recovery," NBG chairman George Zannias said in a statement.

NBG said that together, the two lenders would have deposits of €87.9 billion (\$114.3 billion), loans of €109.7 billion (\$142.6 billion) and a network of 925 branches in Greece.

Earlier Friday, Greek stock market authorities temporarily suspended trading in the two banks following media reports that a merger was possible.

Anticipation of a deal fuelled a strong rally on the Athens stock market, with the benchmark general share index closing 5.05 percent up. The bank sector posted gains of nearly 10 percent.

Shortly before the decision, NBG and Eurobank shares were up 4.5 and 5.5 percent, respectively.

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Malta Hosts First Europe-Arab Summit In A Decade

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Stephen Calleja, Associated Press

VALLETTA, Malta (AP) — Terrorism, lawlessness, immigration and the European debt crisis were all discussed Friday at the first Mediterranean summit since the Arab Spring uprisings.

On the sideline of the summit, French President Francois Hollande said it was up to Spain, not the European Union, to determine whether Spain requires financial assistance from Europe to solve its serious financial difficulties.

The summit on the island of Malta was originally scheduled for 2011 but was postponed because of the dramatic political changes in North Africa. The 5+5 summit, which brings together five European nations and five North African states — Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, Algeria and Morocco — comes to an end Saturday.

Malta's Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi opened the summit stressing the long-term interests of the democratization process in the Arab world.

"There is much work to be done in laying the foundations for a new Mediterranean partnership," Gonzi told journalists.

Hollande, Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and Portuguese Prime Minister Pedro Coelho met afterward to discuss the eurozone crisis. Asked whether the EU is prepared to help Spain, Hollande said it's up to Spain to decide first what it needs to do.

"(Spain must) submit a plan to help with conditions that must be cleared, or not do so if they do not need," he said, emphasizing the importance of stabilization and growth within the EU.

Hollande was expected to seek support for his call to the U.N. Security Council to endorse a West African-led military intervention in northern Mali, where al-Qaida-linked Islamists are in control. However, he did not raise the issue at a closing press conference.

Attending the Mediterranean summit from Africa were Algerian Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal, Libyan Congress President Mohamed El-Magarif, Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, Moroccan Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane, and Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki.

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Almost All EU Nuclear Reactors Need Safety Upgrades, Report Says

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Emily Alpert in Los Angeles

Bringing all of the 145 nuclear reactors in the European Union up to safety standards could cost as much as \$32 billion, says a European Commission report released Thursday.

Sobered by the Fukushima nuclear disaster last year in Japan that forced more than 160,000 people to evacuate, European leaders agreed last year to subject their nuclear reactors to added tests to gauge how well they would withstand earthquakes, floods, airplane crashes and other disasters.

Almost all of the nuclear reactors need some kind of improvements to ensure safety, nuclear safety reviewers found, though none are so dire that they need to be closed. Five nuclear reactors allowed operators less than an hour to restore

safety functions if electrical power was totally lost, the report warns.

The report also faults European Union countries for inconsistency in how they assessed threats to their nuclear reactors, with some countries failing to use International Atomic Energy Agency guidelines for earthquake safety. It urges the EU to set guidelines for protecting nuclear reactors in natural disasters.

More than half of the nuclear reactors did not have emergency equipment stored in a protected place from which it could easily be retrieved, the report said. Eight of 10 reactors need to install or improve instruments to alert plant operators to possible earthquakes.

Forty reactors lack measures to prevent hydrogen explosions that don't have to be triggered by other systems or human intervention; two dozen of them don't have a backup emergency control room in case the main control room becomes uninhabitable because of radiation, fire or other damage.

Countries with nuclear reactors included in the study are now supposed to prepare national action plans laying out how they will improve their safety systems. The European Commission plans to report back on whether its safety recommendations have been carried out in June 2014.

The EU heralded the step as "an unprecedented exercise" laudable for its transparency. However, the environmental group Greenpeace has criticized the "stress tests" as inadequate, failing to weigh all of the types of problems that could befall the reactors in a disaster.

Other critics said the estimated costs of improving the nuclear reactors — ranging from \$13 billion to \$32 billion — made continuing to invest in atomic power too expensive. Socialist EU lawmaker Kathleen van Brempt said that the "extremely disturbing" findings showed money should go to sustainable energy instead.

Central Bank Actions Have 'Alleviated Tensions' In Euro Zone, President Says

Thursday, October 4, 2012

New York Times

By Jack Ewing And Melissa Eddy

The president of the European Central Bank gave a guardedly upbeat assessment of the situation in the euro zone Thursday, saying that troubled countries had made "significant progress"

remaking their economies and that the banking system was healthier.

"So, not bad," Mario Draghi said, with an air of distinct satisfaction, at a press conference in the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana following a meeting of the bank's governing council.

But, perhaps wary of seeming too optimistic and encouraging complacency by elected officials, he added that the state of the euro zone remained tenuous. Early this year, Mr. Draghi also called a turning point in the crisis, only to see tensions return with a vengeance later on.

After a period of intense activity to calm the euro zone crisis, the E.C.B. had not been expected to announce major new policy actions Thursday. And, as expected, the bank left its benchmark interest rate at a record-low 0.75 percent.

Instead, the focus has been on elected leaders, and particularly whether Spain will meet conditions for the E.C.B. to start buying its bonds as a way of restarting bank lending in the country.

Mr. Draghi asserted that the E.C.B.'s promise to buy bonds in so-called Outright Monetary Transactions had "helped to alleviate tensions" in the markets.

He added that the bond purchases, once they begin, "will enable us to provide, under appropriate conditions, a fully effective backstop to avoid destructive scenarios with potentially severe challenges for price stability in the euro area."

But he also called on governments to do their part to continue to make progress on overhauls of national economies and the structure of the euro zone.

And he warned that, if the E.C.B. began buying bonds to help a euro zone country hold down borrowing costs, the bank would cut off aid if countries failed to meet agreed conditions.

Last month, Mr. Draghi set out the terms for the central bank to begin buying euro zone government bonds. One of the conditions was that countries must request help from the euro zone bailout fund. Until Spain takes that step, the E.C.B. is not likely to take action.

The E.C.B. promise last month to intervene in bond markets, as well as Mr. Draghi's vow to do "whatever it takes" to preserve the euro, has calmed tensions considerably. But market interest rates for Spanish bonds have been creeping higher in recent weeks as Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy delays asking for relief, a move which would

require him to accept restrictions on how he manages the economy.

On Thursday, the Spanish Treasury successfully auctioned €4 billion of debt, the maximum amount that it had aimed to sell, amid strong demand and paying lower interest rates than when it last sold such bonds.

Analysts cautioned, however, into reading too much into the positive result.

Nicholas Spiro, managing director of Spiro Sovereign Strategy, a research concern, wrote Thursday in a note that investors were "taking an overly optimistic view" of the eventual effectiveness of the E.C.B. bond-buying program.

"Spain's debt market is currently in a state of limbo," he wrote. "It is being propped up by an E.C.B.-backed bond-buying scheme that has yet to be put into practice."

In his remarks Thursday, Mr. Draghi presented a somewhat rosier picture of the situation in the euro zone, saying that "significant progress" has been made in countries like Spain and Portugal. He also noted that weaker banks in the euro zone had bolstered their capital cushions.

"When I said there has been significant progress, I included the repairing of the banking system," Mr. Draghi said. "The capitalization gap that was pretty wide a couple of years ago has been significantly reduced."

Mr. Draghi ticked off a number of signs that the crisis has eased, including inflows of bank deposits to Italy and a rise in bond sales by banks and corporations, which should help investment and lending. He also said that Spanish banks had become less dependent on lending from the E.C.B., a possible sign they are able to raise funds on markets.

But he added, "We also have to express a note of caution. Volatility is still relatively high. And governments will have to persevere on their reform action."

Mr. Draghi also reiterated his view, which some euro countries have questioned, that the central bank's actions to shore up the euro fall squarely within its purview.

"Let me repeat again what I have said in past months," he said. "We are strictly within our mandate to provide price stability over the medium term, we act independently in determining monetary policy, and the euro is irreversible."

From the E.C.B.'s point of view, there would have been little point in further cutting the main interest rate from 0.75 percent. Rates are already probably too low for stronger countries like Germany, while the official rate is no longer having much effect on borrowing costs for business and consumers in the troubled countries.

In addition, a rate cut now would have left the E.C.B. with few policy options if the situation in the euro zone deteriorates further.

"While a rate cut could easily be justified by the economic outlook," analysts at ING wrote in a note Wednesday, "we think that the E.C.B. is not yet willing to fire this very last shot."

Raphael Minder contributed reporting from Madrid.

Spain Seals Deal With US Over NATO Missile Shield

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — The Spanish government has agreed to participate in NATO's anti-missile shield that will see specialized United States warships based at a Spanish base already used by the U.S. Navy.

Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Saenz de Santamaria said Spain and the U.S. had sealed the deal Friday to use the base in southwestern Spain as part of the shield, enabling four U.S. Navy destroyers and some 1,400 operators to be deployed at the base.

Moscow has long opposed the shield and called for binding guarantees from the U.S. and NATO that it will not target Russia.

The Pentagon also has units at Moron air base in southwest Spain, with a presence of some 4,250 military personnel and 1,000 civilians in the country.

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Catalan Leader Boldly Grasps A Separatist Lever

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Raphael Minder

BARCELONA, Spain ARTUR MAS, the leader of Catalonia, has a clear message for Madrid: He is serious about his threat to let the people of Spain's most economically powerful region decide

for themselves in a referendum whether they should remain a part of Spain.

In fact, he said in an interview this week, he would personally vote for independence if the opportunity arose. "Our ideal is to be part of the United States of Europe," he said.

That kind of posturing has thrust Mr. Mas, 56, to the forefront of Spanish politics and made Catalonia the biggest domestic headache for Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, who is facing troubles on all sides as he tries to satisfy demands from the European Union to straighten out Spain's economy and from Spain's heavily indebted regions, including Catalonia.

The question now for Mr. Rajoy, and for all of Spain, is just how far Mr. Mas, a once relatively obscure politician who was elected regional president two years ago, is willing to go in posing what may be the most serious challenge to a sovereign entity in Europe since the implosion of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

Mr. Mas's talk is not idle. With a \$260 billion economy that is roughly the size of Portugal's, an independent Catalonia and its 7.5 million inhabitants — 16 percent of Spain's population — would rank ahead of a dozen of the 27 nations in the European Union. But like most of Spain's regions, it is under great financial pressure and would like a better deal from Madrid.

In that respect, his threats may amount to nothing more than brinkmanship, as he applies to Madrid much the same tactic it has used to gain favorable treatment in its own dealings with Brussels: that is, that Catalonia, which has its own language and sense of identity, is simply "too big to fail" without calamitous consequences that no one wants to see. On Friday, Catalonia's government raised the pressure, saying it would not be able to meet its September payments for basic services like health care on schedule.

The great risk is that Mr. Rajoy's government — squeezed as it is, itself weighing a European bailout — is hardly in a position to appease Catalonia's demands under a Spanish tax system that redistributes revenue from the richest to the poorest regions, without also raising tensions with other struggling regions.

The grievances run in both directions. In Catalonia's view, Madrid has drained its finances, while Madrid accuses Catalonia, like nearly all of Spain's regions, of mismanaging its books.

In the interview on Wednesday in the Catalan government's medieval palace, Mr. Mas was

unrepentant about further unnerving investors who already question Mr. Rajoy's ability to meet agreed deficit targets and clean up Spanish banks. Instead, he contended that it was Mr. Rajoy who had forced Catalonia down the separatist path, after rejecting its demands unconditionally.

"When you get a clear no, you have to change direction," Mr. Mas said. Although he acknowledged that there was no guarantee Catalonia would succeed in imposing its claims on Madrid, he argued that "the worst-case scenario is not to try, and the second-worst is to try and not get there."

HIS advice to Mr. Rajoy was to avoid further delay in tapping a bond-buying program, devised by the European Central Bank largely with Spain's rescue in mind. European financing — in the form of billions of dollars in subsidies received after Spain joined the European Union in 1986 — had already played a major part in Spain's development, he noted.

"The problems of Spain now supersede its capacities, so that it needs help," Mr. Mas said. "If you have no other choice than to ask for a rescue, the sooner the better."

Asked, however, where Spain would stand without Catalonia, its industrial engine, Mr. Mas was unperturbed. "Spain without Catalonia is not insolvent but more limited," he said.

An economist by training, Mr. Mas comes from a Catalan family linked to the metal and textile sectors, which were at the heart of the region's development after the Industrial Revolution. Having studied at a French school in Barcelona and then learned English, he also stands out as a rare multilingual leader in Spain's political landscape.

He climbed the ladder of Catalonia's politics over a long career as a public servant in the shadows of another politician, Jordi Pujol, who ran Catalonia for more than two decades. While hardly unknown in his region, Mr. Mas has surprised even party insiders this year by the way he has thrown caution to the wind in challenging Mr. Rajoy.

"We all knew Mas as an efficient technocrat and one of our very best managers, but I don't think many people expected him to show such courage and patriotic feelings," said Josep Maria Vila d'Abadal, a mayor and member of Mr. Mas's party, Convergència i Unió.

Mr. Mas insisted that his separatist drive was "not about personal ambition," saying he would retire

from politics once Catalonia achieved sovereignty. He is married with three children.

Even though Catalonia would face an uphill struggle to join the European Union, particularly given Madrid's opposition, Mr. Mas said that Brussels had shown in the two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union that it could adjust to much more dramatic and unforeseeable nationhood claims.

Mr. Mas has already put words into action. Shortly after being rebuffed by Mr. Rajoy over his tax demands, he called early elections in Catalonia — on Nov. 25, two years ahead of schedule — that could turn into an unofficial referendum on independence, after a mass rally in Barcelona on Sept. 11 in which hundreds of thousands of Catalans demanded to form a new European state.

On the heels of the rally, Mr. Mas and his nationalist party are counting on significant gains in next month's election as they try to convince Catalans that Mr. Mas can erase their longstanding complaints about control from Madrid.

"We have created a big feeling of hope among a big part of our society," Mr. Mas said.

SUCH comments, however, have also prompted criticism of Mr. Mas, led by Madrid politicians as well as other regional leaders, who have denounced Catalonia's attempt to break ranks in a time of crisis.

While Mr. Rajoy has steered clear of the wrangling, some conservative politicians have warned of retaliatory measures. His deputy prime minister warned Mr. Mas last week that Madrid would use every legal instrument available to block a Catalan vote on independence, which would violate Spain's Constitution.

Others accuse Mr. Mas of using the tussle with Madrid to shift the blame for Catalonia's economic difficulties onto Mr. Rajoy and to distract voters from his government's own shortcomings, including a failure to meet the deficit target that the Catalan government set for itself last year.

Last week, Pere Navarro, the leader of the opposition Catalan Socialist Party, called Mr. Mas "a false prophet," who talked about a promised land instead of recognizing that he had made Catalonia "worse than two years ago," when Mr. Mas took office.

British Judges Approve Extradition Of Muslim Cleric

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times**By Sarah Lyall, Alan Cowell**

British judges ruled on Friday that five terrorism suspects, including the fiery Islamic preacher Abu Hamza al-Masri, could be extradited to the United States to face an array of terrorism charges after years of legal battles that tested the balance between civil liberties and national security.

Rejecting appeals by all five men, Sir John Thomas, one of two senior judges hearing the case, said no further appeals were legally possible. The British Home Office said officials were working to extradite the men "as quickly as possible."

Mr. Masri, 54, had been an object of fascination in this country. Hook-handed and one-eyed because of injuries caused by explosives many years ago, he attracted a following among militants as much as he drew the reproach of his foes and the attention of the British security services.

The United States has been seeking his extradition since 2004 to face 11 charges, some dating back 14 years. The charges accuse him of calling for holy war in Afghanistan, playing a role in kidnappings in Yemen and participating in a plot to set up a terrorism training camp in Bly, Ore. Since 2006, he has been incarcerated in Britain on other charges, including incitement to murder.

Babar Ahmad, 37, a computer specialist who is one of the other suspects, had been championed by civil rights campaigners, who complained that he had spent eight years in detention without charge while his requests to be tried in Britain were ignored.

"Each of these claimants long ago exhausted the procedures in the United Kingdom," said Judge Thomas, noting that they had failed to win support from the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled in favor of extradition in April. He said it was in "the interests of justice" that they be tried as quickly as possible.

It was not immediately clear when the authorities would send the five men to the United States.

Before the ruling on Friday, a crowd of demonstrators protesting the possible extradition confronted a line of police officers outside the Royal Courts of Justice in central London, brandishing placards proclaiming "Islam will prevail" and "U.S. and U.K. the real terrorists."

When they began their latest bid to stave off extradition, lawyers for Mr. Masri, 54, said on Tuesday that he was physically unfit to face the accusations against him and that it would be

"oppressive to extradite him" under the terms of British law.

Mr. Masri, born Mostafa Kamel Mostafa in Egypt, is the son of an army officer and came to Britain as a student in 1979. As he grew in stature as a radical preacher, his fiery sermons at the Finsbury Park mosque in north London attracted many followers at a time when British security services seemed to play down his importance.

At the same time, though, the mosque became a gathering point for militants who were later linked to terrorist attacks. One of them was Richard Reid, the so-called shoe bomber, who is serving a life term for his attempt to bring down a trans-Atlantic flight in 2002. Another was Zacarias Moussaoui, accused of having trained to be the hypothetical "20th bomber" in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States. Both men are imprisoned at a so-called supermax prison in Colorado.

Mr. Masri's lawyers had been seeking an injunction to prevent his extradition while he has a medical scan to determine whether health problems — listed by his lawyers as long-term depression, an inability to concentrate and short-term memory loss — amount to a degenerative condition. He also suffers from diabetes, psoriasis and the effects of long-term sleep deprivation related to being awakened every hour of the night by prison guards, his lawyers say.

The other men wanted in the United States, along with Mr. Ahmad, are Seyla Talha Ahsan, Adel Abdul Bary, and Khaled al-Fawwaz. Mr. Bary and Mr. Fawwaz were charged with multiple murders in the 1998 bombings of the American Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya, which killed more than 200 people. Mr. Ahsan and Mr. Ahmad are charged with providing support to terrorists and conspiracy-related offenses.

Accused Terrorist Abu Hamza En Route To US Saturday, October 6, 2012**ABC News**

Radical cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri, the man authorities said tried to set up a terrorist training camp on American soil, is finally on his way to stand trial in the U.S. after an eight-year delay.

Hamza, along with four other suspected terrorists, will fly to the States in the custody of U.S. Marshals, British officials told ABC News just hours after the defendants lost a last ditch appeal to the British courts. The officials said there had been "dreadful weather" but they still have "every intention to get them airborne tonight."

"There is great relief here that these men who have used every opportunity to delay and frustrate extradition will soon be on their way to face justice in U.S.," one British government source told ABC News.

An indictment against Hamza, the one-eyed and hook-handed former imam at the Finsbury Park mosque in London, was unsealed after his arrest by British authorities in 2004. It accused Hamza of a litany of terrorism-related crimes including his alleged role in what turned out to be a deadly hostage-taking operation in Yemen. It also said Hamza had tried to set up a terrorist training camp in Oregon and was accused of providing material support to al Qaeda and the Taliban.

The Finsbury Park mosque where Hamza preached was attended by Sept. 11 conspirator Zacarias Moussaoui and Richard Reid, the infamous "shoe bomber," according to The Associated Press. A senior U.K. terrorism official told the AP the mosque was a "honeypot for extremists."

The four other suspects, Adel Abdul Bary, Khalid al-Fawwaz, Babar Ahmad and Syed Talha Ahsan, are also facing terrorism-related charges.

Together, the group had put up fierce legal opposition to extradition and had argued they had human rights concerns about the conditions they would face in U.S. prisons. The U.S. government first requested Hamza's extradition when he was picked up by British police in 2004.

The U.S. Embassy in London said in a release it was "pleased" with the U.K. court's decision to extradite the group and said the move marked "the end of a lengthy process of litigation."

"The U.S. Government agrees with the ECHR's findings that the conditions of confinement in U.S. prisons — including in maximum security facilities — do not violate European standards. In fact, the Court found that services and activities provided in U.S. prisons surpass what is available in most European prisons," the embassy said.

Abu Hamza Extradited To US After UK Ruling Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Jill Lawless, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Radical preacher Abu Hamza al-Masri and four other terror suspects were extradited from the U.K. after Britain's High Court ruled they had no more grounds for appeal in their yearslong battles to avoid facing charges in the United States.

Scotland Yard said Friday the suspects had been brought to an air force base in eastern England from Long Lartin Prison, where two planes provided by U.S. authorities were waiting to fly them to America. The aircraft took off shortly before midnight, Scotland Yard said.

The extraditions came just hours after a ruling at the High Court, where Judges John Thomas and Duncan Ouseley rejected last-ditch applications by al-Masri, Khaled al-Fawwaz, Babar Ahmad, Adel Abdul Bary and Syed Talha Ahsan, who have been battling extradition for between eight and 14 years.

Thomas said there were no grounds for any further delay, noting that it was "in the interest of justice that those accused of very serious crimes, as each of these claimants is in these proceedings, are tried as quickly as possible as is consistent with the interests of justice."

"It follows that their extradition to the United States of America may proceed immediately," the judge said in a ruling that was welcomed by the U.S. Embassy and prompted assurances from the British government to put the men on planes to the United States "as quickly as possible."

The five have sought to avoid extradition by raising concerns about human rights and the conditions they would face in a U.S. prison. Both British and European courts have ruled that they can be sent to the U.S. to face charges, but they sought last-minute injunctions from the High Court.

The suspects face a variety of charges stretching back several years.

The best known of the defendants is al-Masri, an Egyptian-born former nightclub bouncer who turned London's Finsbury Park Mosque into a training ground for radical Islamists during the 1990s. The mosque was once attended by Sept. 11 conspirator Zacarias Moussaoui and "shoe bomber" Richard Reid.

Al-Masri is wanted in the U.S. on charges that include conspiring with Seattle men to set up a terrorist training camp in Oregon and helping abduct 16 hostages, two of them American tourists, in Yemen in 1998.

Ahmad and Ahsan face charges in Connecticut relating to websites that allegedly sought to raise cash, recruit fighters and seek equipment for terrorists in Afghanistan and Chechnya.

Bary and al-Fawwaz were indicted with others, including Osama bin Laden, for their alleged roles

in the bombings of two U.S. embassies in east Africa in 1998. Al-Fawwaz faces more than 269 counts of murder.

Al-Masri has been in a British jail since 2004 on separate charges of inciting racial hatred and encouraging followers to kill non-Muslims.

Lawyers for the 54-year-old preacher, who has one eye and hooks in place of hands he claims to have lost fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, argued in court that his deteriorating physical and mental health meant it would be "oppressive" to send him to a U.S. prison. They said he suffers from depression, chronic sleep deprivation, diabetes and other ailments.

The judges said his conditions could be treated in the U.S., and concluded that "there is nothing to suggest that extradition in this case would be unjust or oppressive."

Before Friday's ruling, a small group of Islamist protesters gathered outside the court to denounce the planned extraditions. A few scuffled briefly with police and one seized a placard reading "Sling His Hook" from a demonstrator expressing the opposite view.

While al-Masri has been portrayed in the British media as one of the most dangerous men in the country, the case of Babar Ahmad has raised concerns among legal experts and human rights advocates.

Ahmad, a London computer expert, is accused in the U.S. of running terrorist-funding websites. He and Ahsan both face charges including using a website to provide support to terrorists and conspiracy to kill, kidnap, maim or injure persons or damage property in a foreign country.

Ahmad and Ahsan could be in court in Connecticut, where an Internet service provider was allegedly used to host one of the websites, on Saturday if they are extradited as planned from Britain.

A hearing was scheduled for Ahmad and Ahsan in U.S. District Court in New Haven on Saturday morning, U.S. Marshal Joseph Faughnan said Friday.

Some lawyers and lawmakers have expressed concerns about the case, because Britain agreed to extradite him even though his alleged crimes were committed in Britain and British courts declined to prosecute him for lack of evidence.

In prison since 2004, Ahmad has been held without charge for the longest period of any British citizen detained since the Sept. 11 attacks.

In a statement read on his behalf outside court, Ahmad said his case had exposed flaws in U.S.-U.K. extradition arrangements. "I leave with my head held high, having won the moral victory," he said.

His father, Ashfaq Ahmad, said he would continue to fight for his son.

"It's not just one Babar Ahmad. Tomorrow there will be another Babar Ahmad and another one," he said.

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Five Pre-9/11 Al Qaida Suspects Are Headed To United States

Saturday, October 6, 2012

McClatchy

By Lindsay Wise, Hannah Allam

A British court on Friday agreed to send five accused terrorists to the United States to stand trial for a wide range of alleged crimes, including the 1998 bombings of two American embassies in East Africa that killed more than 220 people.

The court's decision cleared the way for what will be among the highest profile terrorism prosecutions in the United States in recent years.

Among the suspects was Abu Hamza al Masri, a one-eyed radical Islamist preacher who is accused of supporting al Qaida. The Egyptian-born Masri, a striking figure with a bushy beard and a hook in place of his missing right hand, could appear before an American judge within days on terror charges that are unusual because many of the alleged crimes predate the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Masri, 54, is sought by U.S. prosecutors for his alleged involvement in a deadly kidnapping in Yemen and in plans for a militant training camp in Oregon. His tirades against the West, including voicing support for the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, reportedly inspired several high-profile militants, such as the so-called "20th hijacker," Zacarias Moussaoui.

On Friday, two United Kingdom High Court judges dismissed Masri's request to delay proceedings in order for him to undergo a brain scan that his lawyers said would prove he was unfit for transfer, according to news reports. Masri didn't attend the court session.

"The sooner he is put on trial, the better," the British judges said in their decision, according to the BBC.

U.S. authorities are "extremely pleased" with the court's decision, Justice Department spokesman Dean Boyd said in a statement. Boyd called the extraditions "a critical milestone in a multi-year effort by successive U.S. administrations to bring these terrorism suspects to justice."

Masri had fought his extradition for eight years, with lawyers arguing that his transfer to the United States would be detrimental to ailments such as depression and sleep deprivation stemming from his long stint in prison.

The judges countered that U.S. prisoners have access to good medical care. The BBC reported that all five suspects already had left prison and would be en route soon to the United States via civilian planes belonging to the Justice Department. Boyd said the men would be held in federal detention facilities, but he declined to say where.

"We are confident that, like other terrorist defendants incarcerated in our federal prisons, these defendants can be housed securely with no danger to the public," Boyd said.

Under no circumstances will the men be sent to the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo, Cuba, for prosecution at the Pentagon's war court, a Justice Department source told The Miami Herald on Friday, soon after extradition was approved.

"The United Kingdom has authorized their extradition to the United States only for prosecution on the charges pending against them in federal civilian courts, and, therefore, they may not be tried in military commissions," said the official, who answered questions on condition he not be named.

Their federal indictments date back to the Clinton and Bush administrations, said the official, who noted that several co-defendants and associates of the men now facing extradition from Britain already have been prosecuted and sentenced in terror cases in federal courts in Manhattan and Connecticut.

To make sure they wouldn't go to Guantanamo for prosecution, the British government specifically sought, and got, "binding commitments" between 2004 and 2008 regarding these five particular men, the official said. The negotiations, done as part of U.S.-U.K. treaty negotiations, made clear they "would only be tried in federal civilian court," he added.

Abu Hamza al Masri is a nom de guerre. He was born Mustafa Kamel Mustafa, according to the Justice Department, and immigrated to the United Kingdom to study engineering in the 1970s. A former nightclub bouncer, Masri gained a following as the imam of the notorious Finsbury Park Mosque in north London before British authorities jailed him in 2006 for inciting murder and racial hatred based on fiery sermons he'd delivered years earlier.

The United States has sought to extradite him since 2004, when a federal grand jury in New York indicted him on 11 charges, including hostage-taking and conspiracy to take hostages. Sixteen tourists were held captive in the 1998 attack in Yemen. Four of them were killed.

Masri also was indicted for "providing material support" to terrorists for allegedly setting up an al Qaida training camp in Bly, Ore., from 1999 to 2000, and for supporting violent jihad in Afghanistan.

Adel Abdel Bary, a 52-year-old Egyptian citizen, and Khaled al-Fawwaz, a 50-year-old Saudi Arabian citizen, face murder and conspiracy charges in connection with the bombings of U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in August 1998. They were indicted by a federal grand jury in New York in 2000.

British citizens Babar Ahmad, 38, and Syed Talha Ahsan, 33, were indicted in Connecticut in 2004 and 2006 on charges of providing material support to terrorists and conspiracy to kill people overseas. Ahmad also is accused of money laundering.

UK Court Rules Kenyan Torture Victims Can Sue

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Danica Kirka, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The High Court ruled Friday that three elderly Kenyans tortured during a rebellion against British colonial rule can proceed with compensation claims against the U.K. government — a case with potentially broad implications for thousands of others who claim similar abuse.

The case involves Kenyans who say they were beaten and sexually assaulted by officers acting for the British administration trying to suppress the "Mau Mau" rebellion in the 1950s. Groups of Kenyans had attacked British officials and white farmers who had settled in some of Kenya's most fertile lands.

The British government expressed disappointment with the decision and said it would appeal. But it did "not dispute that each of the claimants in this case suffered torture and other ill treatment at the hands of the colonial administration."

The government had sought to have the case dismissed, arguing it could not be held legally responsible for the abuses. It had argued that the liabilities of the colonial administration passed onto the Kenyan government upon the country's independence from Britain in 1963.

"The normal time limit for bringing a civil action is three to six years," the Foreign Office said in a statement. "In this case, that period has been extended to over 50 years, despite the fact that the key decision makers are dead and unable to give their account of what happened."

The book "Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya" helped prompt the legal action. The author, Caroline Elkins, called Friday's ruling "seismic" and said Britain will now have to answer for injustices in all its former colonies.

"For the Kenyan victims of British colonial torture, it acknowledges their unimaginable sufferings and validates their humanity. It also serves as a reminder to all governments that regardless of how much time has passed, they can and will be held accountable," she said by email. "Today's ruling is a victory not only for the Mau Mau claimants, but for victims of colonial torture throughout the former British Empire."

The Kenyans say the British were aware the Kenyans were being mistreated and demanding compensation. Wambugu Wa Nyingi, Paulo Muoka Nzili and Jane Muthoni Mara submitted written evidence that described horrific abuse at the hands of the colonial authorities.

In Kenya, when news of the judgment broke, about 100 elderly men and women involved in the Mau Mau struggle against the British broke into song and dance.

Nyingi, an 85-year-old claimant in the case, said he is happy with the way the case is proceeding. Nyingi said he was detained and tortured for 10 years.

"It spoiled my prime years. My body still doesn't feel right from all the beatings," he said. "I was unable to produce in my youthful years and even educate my children to the level where they would be self-sufficient. I now live in squalor and that's why I am asking the British what can they do for me so I can live a normal life."

George Morara, an official with the Kenya Human Rights Commission, which helped compile testimony, said the group has been receiving overtures from Britain to settle the case out of court.

Some said they never got over watching their colleagues die.

Nyingi, a laborer said he still bears marks from leg manacles and has had nightmares about beatings.

"If I could speak to the queen, I would say that Britain did many good things in Kenya, but that they also did many bad things," he said. "The settlers took our land, they killed our people and they burnt down our houses ... I do not hold her personally responsible, but I would like the wrongs which were done to me and other Kenyans to be recognized by the British government so that I can die in peace."

The case could be problematic for Britain, which fears similar claims of citizens of other former colonies who also hold grievances over the way they were treated under British rule. A lawyer for the Kenyans suggested that the British government could potentially face thousands of claims from Kenyans who suffered similar torture.

"This is an historic judgment which will reverberate around the world and will have repercussions for years to come," attorney Martyn Day said. "Following this judgment, we can but hope that our government will at last do the honorable thing and sit down and resolve these claims."

Day suggested that victims of torture in other corners of the British empire would be looking at the judgment "with great care."

Around 90,000 Kenyans were executed, tortured or maimed during the crackdown against the Mau Mau, the Kenya Human Rights Commission has said.

Among those detained was President Barack Obama's grandfather, Hussein Onyango Obama.

Associated Press reporters Andrew Meldrum in Johannesburg, South Africa, and Tom Odula in Nairobi, Kenya contributed to this report.

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German Catholic Church Links Tax To The Sacraments

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Melissa Eddy

BERLIN — It is a paradox of modern Germany that church and state remain so intimately tied. That bond persists more and more awkwardly, it seems, as the church's relationship with followers continues to fray amid growing secularization.

Last week one of Germany's highest courts rankled Catholic bishops by ruling that the state recognized the right of Catholics to leave the church — and therefore avoid paying a tax that is used to support religious institutions. The court ruled it was a matter of religious freedom, while religious leaders saw the decision as yet another threat to their influence on modern German society.

With its ruling the court also dodged the thorny issue of what happens when a parishioner formally quits the church, stops paying taxes, but then wants to attend services anyway. The court said that, too, was a matter of religious freedom, a decision that so rankled religious leaders fearful of losing a lucrative revenue stream that they made clear, right away, that taxes are the price for participation in the church's most sacred rituals: no payments, no sacraments.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference in Germany issued a crystal clear, uncompromising edict, endorsed by the Vatican. It detailed that a member who refuses to pay taxes will no longer be allowed to receive communion or make confession, to serve as godparents or to hold any office in the church. Those who leave can also be refused a Christian burial, unless they "give some sign of repentance," it read.

"Whoever declares they are leaving the church before official authorities, for whatever reason, impinges on their responsibility to safeguard the community of the church, and against their responsibility to provide financial support to allow the church to fulfill its work" before their death, it read.

The tussle highlighted the long-established but increasingly troubled symbiosis between church and state in Europe that, repeated polls have shown, grows more secular-minded as each generation moves further away from the church. Like many European countries, Germany's churches are independent but function in partnership with the state, which collects taxes from members of established religions and then funnels the revenues back to the religious

institutions, for a fee, in keeping with a 19th-century agreement following abolishment of an official state church.

Income from church taxes in Germany amounted to about \$6.3 billion for the Roman Catholic Church in 2011, and \$5.5 billion for the Protestant, mostly Lutheran, churches in 2010, official statistics show. The money goes to support hospitals, schools, day care and myriad other social services, but a sizable amount of the Catholic money is also channeled to the Vatican.

The German church tax — which is 8 to 9 percent of the annual income tax — is so steep, however, that many people formally quit the church to avoid paying, while nevertheless remaining active in their faith. That is what is angering Catholic Church officials.

To many faithful, the court ruling validated that choice, and the edict from the Catholic Bishops' Conference amounted to a sharp response by church leaders against the government's increasingly aggressive secularism taking root in society. They see it threatening the future of the religious institutions upon which Germany's modern democracy was founded.

Unlike the United States, where politicians attend prayer breakfasts, and service as an altar boy is cast as a solid political credential, discussion of faith plays little role in German public discourse. Although Chancellor Angela Merkel's party is called the Christian Democrats, and her father was a minister, the outward emphasis is far more on democracy than on Christianity.

The contrast could be seen starkly at a recent gala in Berlin honoring 30 years since the former leader Helmut Kohl's first term as chancellor. Of a dozen international speakers, only three sought God's blessing for Germany. Two were the American speakers, the elder George Bush and Philip D. Murphy, the ambassador to Germany. The other was a Catholic priest.

Even so, it is the United States, where churches are tax exempt, that prides itself on a constitutional separation between church and state, while most European governments continue to support their churches through a variety of means.

In Belgium, Greece and Norway, churches are financed by the state. Churches in Austria, Switzerland and Sweden all use the state to collect taxes from members, but the contributions are either predetermined amounts or, compared with Germany, a more modest 1 to 2 percent of the

annual assessed income tax. Spain and Italy allow congregants to decide whether they would like a percentage of their income to flow to religious organizations or be earmarked for civic projects.

In Germany, roughly a third of its 82 million people are Roman Catholics, and about the same number belong to the country's Protestant churches. All of these members, as well as the estimated 120,000 Jews, pay taxes to the state. Muslim organizations rely on donations or support from outside sources, often based in countries abroad.

Critics charge that the German bishops' decree denying sacraments to tax dodgers was driven more by greed than necessity, pointing out that belonging to a congregation in neighboring countries like the Netherlands or France is based on tithes, not a predetermined charge levied by the government.

Indeed, the tax in Germany is blamed in part for driving about three million members from the ranks of the Roman Catholic Church over the past two decades, as disgruntled parishioners decided the payments were better spent on something else.

Norbert Lüdecke, a professor of canon law at Bonn University, said that while every disobedient Catholic is to be punished based on the sin committed, the bishops' decree effectively placed refusal to pay church taxes nearly on par with the most severe offenses in the church.

"Now refusing to pay taxes is considered an offense only slightly less bad than denial that Jesus Christ is the son of God," Mr. Lüdecke said. "While at the same time, there is no specific punishment for other offenses, such as, for example, the sexual abuse of minors by clerics."

Germany: Man Charged As Spy For Syria

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Victor Homola

A 48-year-old man with dual German-Lebanese citizenship has been charged with spying for the Syrian intelligence service from 2007 until his arrest in February, the federal prosecutor's office said Friday. The suspect, who was identified only as Mahmoud El A., is accused of spying on Syrian opposition members living in Germany, according to prosecutors. After antigovernment protests began in Syria in early 2011, the suspect intensified his contacts with his intelligence agency handler in Berlin, reporting on gatherings of exiled

opponents of the Syrian government and taking photographs of demonstrators, prosecutors said.

Georgian Govt, Opposition Negotiate Power Handover

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Misha Dzhinzikhashvili, Associated Press

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili's government started negotiations Friday on handing over power to the coalition that won this week's parliamentary elections, but hopes for the first peaceful leadership transfer in the country's post-Soviet history were complicated by opposition claims it was cheated out of an even bigger share of the legislature.

The incoming government is likely to be headed by billionaire businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili, whose Georgian Dream coalition has according to preliminary figures secured more than 80 seats in the 150-member parliament. But the talks are taking place against the backdrop of opposition claims of vote-rigging it says have denied it a more commanding majority.

Election officials said Friday that with returns from all precincts counted, Georgian Dream earned 54.9 percent of the votes cast Monday against the 40.4 percent won by Saakashvili's United National Movement.

Saakashvili will remain as the leader of Georgia until his second and last term ends in October 2013. Under a constitutional reform that goes into effect after he leaves office, many of the president's powers will be transferred to the prime minister, who is chosen by Parliament.

The new parliament will have its first sitting on Oct. 21.

Georgian Dream had hoped to gain at least 100 seats, which would be enough to enable them to make changes to the Constitution. It says violations in a number of races for individual candidates cheated it of that chance. Government officials deny that charge.

Ivanishvili indicated on the campaign trail that he would like to see the constitutional powers of the prime minister, a post he is due to occupy, expanded sooner than next October as currently envisioned.

Georgian Dream supporters have picketed election body offices in a bid for results from several polling stations to be reviewed, although

Ivanishvili has insisted appeals should be made through the courts.

Observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe hailed the election overall, but had some misgivings about the vote counting process.

Despite these disagreements, negotiations appear to have gone smoothly Friday.

"We discussed the governmental transition. It was a very effective meeting," said Irakli Alasania, a member of the Georgian Dream coalition, speaking in English. "We are going to continue these discussions on Monday and we are going to have already concrete results."

By conceding defeat even before the results of the election were released, the 44-year-old Saakashvili defied the opposition's expectations that he would cling to power at all costs and preserved his legacy as a pro-Western leader who brought democracy to the former Soviet republic.

In Washington, the White House welcomed the vote as "the achievement of another milestone in Georgia's democratic development" and urged Saakashvili and Ivanishvili to "work together in the spirit of national unity."

During his nearly nine years in power, Saakashvili has pushed through economic and political reforms and attracted international investment that has led to dramatic economic growth. Poverty and unemployment, however, remain painfully high.

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EAST ASIA & PACIFIC

China Landslide Kills 19, 18 Of Them Students

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — All 18 elementary school students buried in a landslide were confirmed dead Friday, while one other person also died after a hillside collapsed and smothered part of a village in mountainous southwestern China.

The Tiantou Elementary School was buried Thursday when the hillside collapsed in Zhenhe, a village in Yunnan province, the Yiliang County government said on its website.

All 18 students who were buried in the school were confirmed dead, the government said. The

official Xinhua News Agency said the body of a 19th victim was found Friday. It gave no details, but the county government said earlier that a person was missing from a house that had collapsed.

The government also said that a person injured in the landslide was hospitalized.

The landslide dammed a river, causing its water to pool 15 meters (45 feet) across and 7 meters (21 feet) deep around the buried area, hampering rescue efforts and forcing the evacuation of 800 other people, the government said. Rescue teams removed the blockage and the water was subsiding.

While officials have yet to give a cause for the landslide, that part of Yunnan province has been lashed by rain and is prone to earthquakes. A series of quakes last month left 81 people dead and devastated parts of Yiliang county, which are still recovering.

Thursday was a holiday across China, but the students who were killed had been attending school to make up for days missed after the quake, Yiliang officials said. Xinhua said their school was damaged in the quake and they were sent to Tiantou temporarily.

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Fight Over Rocky Islets Opens Old Wounds Between South Korea And Japan

Friday, October 5, 2012

New York Times

By Choe Sang-hun

DOKDO/TAKESHIMA — As they do on any fine-weather day, ferries on Thursday disgorged hundreds of South Korean tourists at these desolate islets. Some charged onto a wharf, waving the national flag and shouting "Daehanminguk manse!" — "Long live the Republic of Korea!" Others unfurled a "Dokdo is our territory" banner and snapped group photographs.

The visitors were part of the flood of tourists who have visited this year — 153,000 and counting — amid a flare-up of long-simmering tensions over the islets, which are administered by South Korea but also claimed by Japan.

There is little for tourists to do here except express their sentiments. The islets are treeless volcanic outcroppings where the wind sometimes blows so strongly that the few residents fortify

their windows with duct tape and spend their time dodging bird droppings during the spring migration of gulls. The outcroppings would, in fact, probably be an afterthought if not for the territorial dispute, which centers as much on Japan and South Korea's fraught history as it does on claims of the rich fisheries nearby.

The territorial debate over the islets, known as Dokdo in South Korea and Takeshima in Japan, is one of several simmering in Asia that some analysts fear could lead to hostilities, many of them tied to China's rise and its increasingly assertive claims to territory in the South China Sea. But experts say the increasingly shrill disputes between Japan and its East Asian neighbors, including China and South Korea, are potentially more explosive because the animosity is rooted in good part in anger over Japan's brutal dominance of both countries decades ago rather than solely in a fight for natural resources.

On Dokdo/Takeshima, such anger is palpable.

Kim Seong-do, one of only two South Koreans who live here but do not work for the government — the other is his wife — is perhaps more animated than most on the subject, but strong feelings over the islets are widespread.

"If the Japanese come to take this place by force," said Mr. Kim, 73, "I say 'Give me a rifle.'"

South Korea's leaders have generally tried to keep quiet about the islets, assuming that any discussion would play into Japan's hands. But in recent years, the government has been more aggressive in staking its claim.

In August, President Lee Myung-bak became the first South Korean president to visit. That trip — and his subsequent suggestion that the Japanese emperor did not need to travel to South Korea unless he apologized unequivocally for Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula — set off an unusually strong reaction in Japan, where a weak government has been pushed by a small but vocal group of nationalists to take a stronger stand on territorial disputes.

Last month, the South Korean government opened a small Dokdo museum in Seoul that displays documents and ancient maps that the government says uphold its claims to the islets.

The South Korean government continued its public relations campaign on Thursday, agreeing to fly reporters for Western publications to the islets and allowing rare access to the armed police officers who guard against intrusions by Japan.

The government PowerPoint presentation included a well-known song in South Korea that says in part, "Hi, Dokdo, did you sleep well last night?"

The nationalistic sniping between two of Washington's crucial allies over these specks of land serves as a reminder of the trouble that the United States faces as it tries to "pivot" back to Asia. The standoff contributed to South Korea's decision to back out of an agreement, supported by the United States, to share military intelligence with Japan.

Some historians and security analysts say Washington is partly responsible for the troubles.

Japan says it reconfirmed its sovereignty over the islets in 1905 when it incorporated them into one of its prefectures. But South Korea sees that move as part of Japan's forced annexation of the Korean Peninsula, which was completed in 1910.

While leading the negotiations to redefine Japan's territory after World War II, Washington did not clarify who owned the islets. After the so-called San Francisco Treaty, which set the terms of Japan's surrender, went into force in 1952, South Korea declared the islets as its own, and since 1954 it has kept a police contingent there.

The redistribution of the Japanese Empire after its defeat was "part and parcel of today's problem," said Alexis Dudden, a history professor at the University of Connecticut.

The cold war tamped down the disputes. But now, Ms. Dudden said, the region's territorial fights have become "perfect for competing narratives about the war, which is precisely why increasingly younger generations with no wartime or colonial experience themselves are able to use them for the purposes of stories they wish to tell."

Over the years, South Korea has responded to Japan's recurring claim by adding a wharf, a helipad, a generator, solar-energy panels and a tank that transforms the sea into drinking water. The government also gave street names to the steep stairways zigzagging the cliffs, and so far over 2,100 South Koreans have registered as Dokdo residents though they do not live here.

On Thursday, the Taepyeongyang No. 7, a 4,000-ton police patrol boat, prowled the waters around the islets, keeping watch for a Japanese Coast Guard ship that circles once every four days or so, sailing in international waters.

"It's not supposed to come within 12 miles of Dokdo," said the Taepyeongyang's captain, Superintendent Chung Myong-ho. "If it does, we

will warn it and then ram it, or worse. But so far nothing like that has happened."

Despite the many hardships of living here, it has become a sacred duty among many young South Koreans to defend the islets from what Senior Inspector Lee Kwang-sup, commander of the police contingent, calls a "mean, vulgar and unrepentant nation" across the sea. Twenty to thirty times more police recruits than the government-set quota volunteer to serve here.

Kwon Se-hyon, 19, is one of those who secured the posting. Mr. Kwon is a college student who grew up loving Japanese comic strips and animated cartoons and believing that Koreans have a lot to learn from Japan. Still, in April, he joined 150 police recruits competing for seven open slots on Dokdo, where 45 officers are stationed.

"I didn't want to miss this very special opportunity for a Korean man," he said.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

Power Thieves Prosper In India's Patronage-based Democracy

Thursday, October 4, 2012

Washington Post

By Simon Denyer

MODINAGAR, INDIA — It is no fun being an honest inspector for a state electricity board in India.

All around you, consumers steal electricity on a massive scale. Businesses and ordinary people help themselves by hooking onto power lines illegally or bypassing meters. Vote-hungry local politicians protect the thieves, making any attempt to catch and punish the culprits a dangerous game.

"There is a lot of political interference," inspector Ved Prakash Agrawal said during a raid on the outskirts of the northern town of Modinagar. "The local politicians say 'I will have you killed, I will have you suspended, I will have you transferred.' They complain to our higher-ups. It is very difficult."

In India, about a quarter of all power generated is either stolen or lost in transmission, five times the figure for China. Still more is given away to farmers, while the rest is sold to consumers for a loss, pushing state electricity companies toward bankruptcy and resulting in the rolling blackouts that afflict almost the entire nation every day and undermine its economic prospects.

"Successive governments in India at the central and state levels have considered populism — the promise of cheap or subsidized power — an effective strategy," Arvind Subramanian of the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington recently wrote. "But the consequence has been either no power or highly interrupted power for a vast majority of Indians."

At its worst, India's power sector is the perfect example of populism and patronage trumping sound economics, analysts say. Power symbolizes the way Indian democracy often fails to meet the most basic aspirations of voters for transparent government, jobs, power and opportunity.

"Power is often an important source of the struggle between the politics of patronage and the politics of aspiration," said Ashish Khanna, senior energy specialist at the World Bank in India. "The question is whether a credible promise of improved power delivery can be turned into a new narrative that meets those aspirations, and reaps political dividends."

India's state electricity companies have run up losses of \$46 billion, or 2 percent of national income, largely financed by lending from public sector banks, straining the country's financial system. As a result, the companies have little money to invest in equipment or pay salaries, or even to pay for the electricity they are receiving from newly built private-sector power plants.

Aware that this liquidity crisis was threatening the solvency of the power sector, the Indian cabinet last month approved a debt-restructuring package for the state electricity boards — relief based on whether they improve their performance, do more to stem losses and strengthen regulation at the state level.

While the package has given the sector some breathing space, analysts said there was no guarantee states would stick to their promises and undertake the fundamental reforms required to produce lasting benefits.

"This is a bailout without any assurance that the underlying problem — people paying more for power, politicians stealing less etc. etc. — has been addressed," Subramanian said.

The Uttar Pradesh problem

The scale of the problem is nowhere more apparent than in the vast northern state of Uttar Pradesh, home to 200 million people, a state that encapsulates the worst of Indian politics, where "strongmen" with long criminal records flourish,

and where voting is largely driven by caste and religious allegiance rather than by performance.

The state's power sector is one of India's least efficient and its economic growth rate among the nation's lowest.

One of the main reasons for the massive blackout that affected half of India in late July was that Uttar Pradesh was withdrawing too much electricity from the national grid. That in turn was largely because powerful local politicians had forced the state electricity board to deliver uninterrupted power to key constituencies, a demand that drained its meager resources to the breaking point, power engineers say.

At the same time, the Uttar Pradesh Power Corp., the state enterprise that buys electricity from power plants and sells it to consumers, is virtually bankrupt.

The cost of the electricity it purchases is rising sharply, partly because India's coal industry is stagnating and power stations are forced to import costly foreign coal. But political pressure ensures that the tariffs it charges simply cannot keep pace. Almost every year, local, state or national elections here provide another excuse for inaction.

Theft makes a bad situation significantly worse.

The power corporation has not recruited any new staff for the past 30 years, said R.S. Pandey, director of transmissions. While it used to employ around 100,000 people, it now employs fewer than 40,000, while its customer base has risen tenfold, he added.

Decades-old transformers frequently burn out. Most overhead electric wires are not insulated, making theft as easy as hooking a pole onto them — and law enforcement is virtually nonexistent.

"When we go to the villages, we just do whatever we can in five minutes," said one engineer who was not authorized to give his name. "We just book three people out of 100 offenders and get out. Then we can't go back to that place for four months or so — otherwise they would kidnap us."

Just over a third of households in the state say they even have a power connection, and those that do face severe rationing.

The Confederation of Indian Industry says the power situation is the main obstacle to attracting investment into Uttar Pradesh and is contributing to an exodus of skilled, ambitious young people.

Some bright spots

Yet across India, the picture is not uniformly bleak.

A few states, including Gujarat in the west and West Bengal in the east, as well as the capital Delhi, have enjoyed considerable success in reforming their power sectors in the past decade.

"Political interference at the local level is totally absent here," said Malay Kumar De, West Bengal's power secretary. "We don't have a power rationing or shortage situation. When the government has sent a clear signal that theft is not to be encouraged, things fall into place."

Subramanian said there is a strong correlation between states that have enjoyed fast rates of growth in the past two decades and those with low levels of electricity losses.

Power, he said, is a good proxy for governance in general — states with inefficient power sectors tend to fare poorly in other ways.

If India could crack the power sector, he said, it could help sever the link — "both actual and perceived" — between populism and electoral success.

In New Delhi, Indian Power Minister Veerappa Moily said the debt-restructuring package will provide the incentives states need to reform. "They will resist now," he said, "but they will have to come around. If they want their states to run, they will have to go by this."

Back in Uttar Pradesh, though, the idea that the system will change — and that democracy could work in India's favor — still seems slightly fanciful.

"The politicians and the judiciary we have, it is very difficult to prosecute anybody for the theft of electricity, because the fear of the law is not there," Pandey said. "This is the dark side of Indian democracy. Hooliganism and vandalism is always there."

Rama Lakshmi and Suhasini Raj contributed to this report.

Clash Over Hijab Ban In Azerbaijan **Saturday, October 6, 2012** **New York Times**

BAKU, Azerbaijan (Agence France-Presse) — The police in Azerbaijan's capital on Friday clashed with about 200 Muslim activists who were protesting a ban on the wearing of head scarves in the nation's secondary schools.

Police officers wielding batons fought running battles with protesters in the capital, Baku, as

they broke up the rally outside the Education Ministry.

Video of the clashes posted on the Web site of Radio Azadliq showed officers beating some of the protesters with their batons and some activists fighting back with sticks.

Several police officers were injured, and 72 people were arrested, the police said.

Some of the protesters carried placards with slogans like "Stop Islamophobia" and "Freedom for the hijab."

The Muslim head scarf, or hijab, is prohibited under rules that define what kind of uniforms students must wear in Azerbaijan, a mainly Shiite Muslim country where the authorities have been seeking to prevent the rise of radical Islam.

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Accident Suspected In Agent's Death On Mexican Border

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Michael S. Schmidt

WASHINGTON — Federal authorities said Friday that there were "strong preliminary indications" that a Border Patrol agent who was killed in a shooting on Tuesday in Arizona near the border with Mexico was accidentally shot by another agent.

The authorities also said that another agent who was injured was also probably wounded by an agent.

"While it is important to emphasize that the F.B.I.'s investigation is actively continuing, there are strong preliminary indications that" the agents were shot by another agent, said James L. Turgal Jr., a senior official for the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Arizona.

He added, "At the appropriate time further information will be provided, but while the investigation continues it would be inappropriate to comment any further at this time."

The agent who died, Nicholas Ivie, 30, of Provo, Utah, was shot as he and two other agents responded to a ground sensor that went off near the border Tuesday around 1:50 a.m.

At first, officials said they believed that the sensors had been set off by criminals at the border.

"They were both responding to the same location, one group from the north and another from the south," said George E. McCubbin III, the head of the National Border Patrol Council, a union representing agents.

After the shooting, Republican members of Congress on Tuesday tried to tie it to an investigation of gun trafficking known as Operation Fast and Furious, in which the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives did not seize hundreds of weapons that were purchased illegally, in the hope of tracing them to Mexican drug cartels.

Two of the guns were found at the scene of a 2010 shooting in which a Border Patrol agent, Brian Terry, was killed.

The shooting Tuesday occurred near a Border Patrol station in Naco, Ariz., that had recently been named in honor of Agent Terry.

"There's no way to know at this point how the agent was killed, but because of Operation Fast and Furious, we'll wonder for years if the guns used in any killing along the border were part of an ill-advised gun-walking strategy sanctioned by the federal government," Senator Charles E. Grassley, Republican of Iowa, said Tuesday in a statement. "It's a sad commentary."

Janet Napolitano, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and a former governor of Arizona, met Friday with officials at the Border Patrol station where Agent Ivie worked.

The Border Patrol agent who was wounded in the shooting Tuesday was not identified.

FBI: Friendly Fire Likely In Border Shootings Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Jacques Billeaud And Pete Yost, Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A preliminary investigation has found friendly fire likely was to blame in a shooting that killed one federal agent and wounded another along the Arizona-Mexico border, the FBI said Friday, shaking up the probe into an incident that reignited the political debate over border security.

"There are strong preliminary indications that the death of United States Border Patrol Agent Nicholas J. Ivie and the injury to a second agent was the result of an accidental shooting incident involving only the agents," FBI Special Agent in Charge James L. Turgal Jr. said in a statement.

Turgal didn't elaborate on the agency's conclusions but said the FBI is using "all necessary investigative, forensic and analytical resources" as it investigates the Tuesday shooting about five miles north of the border near Bisbee.

Ivie was killed after he and two other agents responded to an alarm triggered by a sensor aimed at detecting smugglers and others entering the U.S. illegally.

One of the other agents was shot in the ankle and buttocks, but was released from the hospital after surgery. The third agent was uninjured.

The Cochise County Sheriff's Office, which is assisting the FBI in the probe, said federal investigators used ballistic testing to determine the shootings likely were the result of so-called friendly fire among the agents.

Jeffrey D. Self, commander of Customs and Border Protection's Joint Field Command-Arizona, said investigators were making progress and noted the initial findings that the shootings appeared to be accidental didn't diminish the fact that Ivie "gave the ultimate sacrifice and died serving his country."

"The fact is, the work of the Border Patrol is dangerous," Self said during a news conference Friday in Tucson.

While federal authorities declined to offer details of the shooting, George McCubbin, president of the National Border Patrol Council, said the three agents split up as they investigated the sensor alarm, noting they all fired their weapons.

"Coming in from different angles, that is more than likely how it ended up happening," McCubbin told The Arizona Republic of the shootings.

A Mexican law enforcement official said Thursday that federal police had arrested two men who may have been connected to the shootings. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release the information, said it was unclear if there was strong evidence linking the men to the case.

Mexican authorities on Friday didn't immediately respond to telephone messages from The Associated Press.

After a meeting of border governors Friday in Albuquerque, N.M., Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer stood by the criticism she leveled earlier this week in response to the shootings in which she said a political stalemate and the federal government's failures have left the border unsecured and Border Patrol agents in harm's way.

"It's the federal government's responsibility to secure our border, and they need to do that, and then we can deal with all the other issues that have come about because our border hasn't been secured," said Brewer, who plans to attend Ivie's funeral Monday in Sierra Vista.

The Border Patrol couldn't immediately comment on the frequency of friendly fire shootings involving its agents. But such incidents appeared to be extremely rare, if they've ever occurred at all.

"I know of absolutely none in the past, and my past goes back to 1968," said Kent Lundgren, chairman of the National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers, citing the year he joined the agency. "I'm not saying it never happened. I'm just saying I've never heard of it."

Also Friday, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano traveled to Arizona to express her condolences to Ivie's family and meet with authorities. The family did not return calls from The Associated Press on Friday.

Ivie's death marked the first fatal shooting of an agent since a deadly 2010 firefight with Mexican bandits that killed U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry in December 2010 and spawned congressional probes of a botched government gun-smuggling investigation.

Terry's shooting was later linked to that "Fast and Furious" operation, which allowed people suspected of illegally buying guns for others to walk away from gun shops with weapons, rather than be arrested.

Authorities intended to track the guns into Mexico. Two rifles found at the scene of Terry's shooting were bought by a member of the gun-smuggling ring being investigated. Critics of the operation say any shooting along the border now will raise the specter that those illegal weapons are still being used.

Twenty-six Border Patrol agents have died in the line of duty since 2002.

Associated Press writers Brian Skoloff in Phoenix, Susan Montoya Bryan in Albuquerque, N.M., and Olga R. Rodriguez in Mexico City contributed to this report.

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Feds Team Up With Amtrak To Fight Human Trafficking

Friday, October 5, 2012

Washington Times

By Jerry Seper, The Washington Times

A federal partnership was unveiled Thursday involving the Departments of Homeland Security and Transportation, along with Amtrak, that will seek to combat human trafficking by training more than 8,000 front-line transportation employees and Amtrak police officers to identify trafficking victims and perpetrators and report suspected cases.

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Amtrak President and CEO Joseph Boardman said the partnership will use "training and awareness materials" developed by the Homeland Security and Transportation departments to deny the use of the U.S. transportation system as an "enabler in these criminal acts."

Homeland Security has described the trafficking of men, women and children for sex and forced labor around the world as "one of the most heinous crimes" it investigates, saying that in its worst manifestation, human trafficking is akin to modern-day slavery.

Estimates suggest there are more than 20 million human trafficking victims worldwide. The entrapment and exploitation of mostly women and children are thought to generate billions of dollars each year.

"Today, we pledge to do more to combat human trafficking by broadening our network of partners to help us identify and rescue victims and help bring the perpetrators to justice," Ms. Napolitano said in announcing the partnership. "We're grateful to have the participation of Amtrak and the Department of Transportation in this important effort, which will help save lives, protect innocent victims and prevent this form of modern-day slavery."

In 2010, Homeland Security launched what it called the Blue Campaign, which sought to unify department components to more effectively combat human trafficking through enhanced public awareness, training, victim assistance and law enforcement investigations.

The Blue Campaign described human trafficking as the use of force, fraud or coercion to compel someone into labor servitude or commercial sexual exploitation. It also noted that every minor exploited for commercial sex was a victim of

human trafficking, even without force, fraud or coercion.

Mr. LaHood said that in addition to the partnership, the Transportation Department is working with all modes of transportation to help stop the flow of human trafficking.

"Raising awareness can save lives, and we all have a responsibility to keep an eye out for these activities," he said.

Mr. Boardman said Amtrak Supports the Homeland Security and Transportation departments' initiative to improve human trafficking awareness in the transportation industry and "is proud to be the first partner in a program that will expand across the transportation sector."

In March, President Obama directed his administration to redouble efforts to eliminate human trafficking, reaffirming what he described as America's commitment to leading the global movement against that crime. The administration called stopping trafficking "one of the great human rights causes of our time."

In Venezuela, Fears Persist Among Voters Ahead Of Election

Friday, October 5, 2012

New York Times

By William Neuman

Hugo Chávez, a polarizing president who has led Venezuela for nearly 14 years, has many advantages over the opposition candidate trying to unseat him on Sunday, from the airwaves he controls to the government largess he doles out with abandon. But one especially potent weapon in Mr. Chávez's arsenal is what might be called the fear factor.

Many Venezuelans who are eager to send Mr. Chávez packing, fed up with the country's lackluster economy and rampant crime, are nonetheless anxious about casting their ballot out of fear that voting against the president can mean being fired from a government job, losing a government-built home or being cut off from social welfare benefits.

"I work for the government and it scares me," said Luisa Arismendi, 33, a schoolteacher who cheered on a recent morning as Mr. Chávez's challenger, Henrique Capriles Radonski, drove by, waving from the back of a pickup truck. Until this year, she always voted for Mr. Chávez and she hesitated before giving her name, worried about what would happen if her supervisors found out she was

switching sides. "If Chávez wins," she said, "I could be fired."

Although polls diverge widely, with some predicting a victory for Mr. Chávez and others showing a race that is too close to call, there is wide agreement that Mr. Chávez is vulnerable as never before. Handicapping the election is complicated by the angst felt by many Venezuelans that a simple vote for the opposition could bring retaliation.

In advance of Sunday's balloting, the government introduced a new electronic voting system that many Venezuelans fear might be used by the government to track who voted against the president. Electoral officials and opposition leaders defend the integrity of the system but there is significant distrust and a big part of Mr. Capriles's campaign has been to reassure voters that their votes will remain secret.

"The government has sown this fear," Mr. Capriles said in an interview, adding that the reluctance of people to speak their mind skewed opinion polls in favor of Mr. Chávez. "If we can overcome the fear, I believe that we can win this election by a million votes."

The fear has deep roots. Venezuelans bitterly recall how the names of millions of voters were made public after they signed a petition for an unsuccessful 2004 recall referendum to force Mr. Chávez out of office. Many government workers whose names were on the list lost their jobs.

Mr. Chavez runs a well-oiled patronage system, a Tammany Hall-like operation but on a national scale. Government workers are frequently required to attend pro-Chávez rallies, and they come under other pressures.

"They tell me that I have to vote for Chávez," said Diodimar Salazar, 37, who works at a government-run day care center in a rural area southeast of Cumaná. "They always threaten you that you will get fired."

Ms. Salazar said that her pro-Chávez co-workers insisted that the government would know how she voted. But experience has taught her otherwise. She simply casts her vote for the opposition and then tells her co-workers that she voted for Mr. Chávez.

"I'm not going to take the risk," said Fabiana Osteicoechea, 22, a law student in Caracas who said she would vote for Mr. Chávez even though she is an enthusiastic supporter of Mr. Capriles. She said she was certain that Mr. Chávez would win and was afraid that the government career

she hopes to have as a prosecutor could be blocked before it begins if she votes the wrong way.

"After the election, he's going to have more power than now, lots more, and I think he will have a way of knowing who voted for whom," she said. "I want to get a job with the government so, obviously, I have to vote for Chávez."

Venezuela is a major oil supplier to the United States and the election gives voters a stark choice, with Mr. Chávez, 58, whose health has been an issue after undergoing treatment for an undisclosed form of cancer, pushing the country farther down the road toward his version of socialism.

Mr. Capriles, 40, who has served as legislator, mayor and governor, said he would follow the Brazilian model of business friendly policies to expand the economy, coupled with social programs to help the poor. He has hammered away at government inefficiencies and mismanagement, and focused on runaway crime, high on the agenda of every Venezuelan.

Mr. Capriles's bid is an uphill one. Mr. Chávez uses the entire state apparatus, including television and radio stations and government workers, to promote his campaign, and he exerts outsized influence over the courts and the electoral council. He has hugely bolstered government spending this year on social programs to attract voters. And he retains the loyalty of legions of adoring followers.

In the last presidential election, in 2006, Mr. Chávez won with more than 62 percent of the vote. He received 7.3 million votes then and says he will get 10 million this year.

At campaign events, he urges supporters to defend his revolution and to look beyond the many unresolved problems.

"On Oct. 7, what's at stake is not whether or not the lights went out or if there was or wasn't running water, or if they haven't given me a house, or that I don't have a job yet or that I'm angry at I-don't-know-who," Mr. Chávez said at a rally last week in Maturín, a city southeast of Cumaná. "What's at stake is the life of the country, the future of the youth, of the children, of all of Venezuela."

With discontent rising, though, Mr. Capriles has made significant inroads in Mr. Chávez's strongholds, especially poor urban slums.

"He fooled all of us but we are waking up," Lisbet Márquez, 46, a Cumaná high school teacher, said

of the president. She used to support him but now feels the country has stagnated.

Mr. Chávez got more than 70 percent of the vote in 2006 in the working-class Buena Vista neighborhood where Ms. Márquez lives, yet today many homes display Capriles posters.

"My family was 100 percent Chavista," she said, indicating that more than two dozen people in her extended family were changing their vote from Mr. Chávez to Mr. Capriles.

In Cumaná, the capital of the northeastern state of Sucre, the roads and highways are in terrible shape, the sewage systems are lacking or inadequate, power failures are routine, thousands of local jobs were lost when Mr. Chávez banned a common form of commercial fishing several years ago, and the teachers at many schools refuse to hold classes because the governor, a Chávez stalwart, has not paid their full wages.

But it has been harder for Mr. Capriles to dent the strong support for Mr. Chávez in rural areas.

There, analysts say, poverty rates are often higher and the role of government in people's lives can be even more intense than in cities; the government is often the biggest employer and residents may be even more likely to rely on welfare programs.

"Before, the people in the countryside weren't taken into account, we were forgotten," said Mercedes Rodríguez, 35, who lives with her mother and her two children in a mud-wall house in a hamlet called La Florida, southeast of Cumaná.

Ms. Rodríguez, who has a poster of Mr. Chávez on her veranda, is a member of his political party. In the morning she works for the state government in a job that combines the functions of social worker, helping local residents get government services, and political organizer, getting those same residents to marches and out to vote in support of Mr. Chávez.

"There's no one else like him," she said of Mr. Chávez, predicting that he would win again handily.

Will Sunday's Vote Oust Venezuelan Leader Hugo Chavez?

Friday, October 5, 2012

USA Today

By Girish Gupta

CARACAS, Venezuela — Swigging a bottle of beer before midday in a grimy cobbler's shop where he

works, Cesar Jiménez argues with a colleague on Venezuelan politics.

"If socialism were so good," he says, "then why isn't the whole world socialist?" Jiménez, 40, lives and works in Petare, a huge barrio with a population of up to 3 million between two and three million people overshadowing Caracas, and is a longtime supporter of President Hugo Chávez, the self-styled socialist who has led Venezuela for 13 years.

This Sunday, however, as Chávez faces his toughest presidential election yet, Jiménez will vote instead for his challenger, Henrique Capriles Radonski, a vibrant 40-year-old state governor.

"I've had enough," the cobbler says. "The insecurity, the broken promises."

Capriles' campaign represents the first time that Venezuela's various opposition parties have rallied behind one candidate who stands a chance against Chávez.

News polls have Chávez, 58, ahead — but not by much. And bastions of support for Chávez are now full of former supporters who complain the strongman — who claims to be one of the people — has abandoned them.

When Chávez burst into democratic politics in 1999 with bombastic speeches about socialism and anger at American "imperialism," he was swept into power with votes from Venezuela's dispossessed and middle class.

He vowed to seize Venezuela's vast oil deposits and spend the proceeds lavishly on the poor. For a time, many impoverished families received help they never had; small health clinics appeared, some public housing was built.

It was enough of a change for many rural poor to overlook increasing restrictions Chávez was placing on private economic activity and freedoms of expression and the press.

As a result, Chávez was elected twice more: in 2000 and 2006.

As Chávez has allied himself with regimes such as Iran and Cuba and hurled

insults at the United States, poverty, inflation and food prices have steadily increased. Capriles alleges Chávez packed the oil industry with cronies making it inefficient and frightening away foreign investment that could boost production. It may be crime that hurts Chávez the most.

Drug cartels fighting for turf have given Venezuela one of the highest murder rates in the world,

comparable to war zones, according to the Venezuela Violence Observatory.

Capriles has capitalized on the poor outcomes of Chávez's socialist revolution, drawing support not exclusively from the traditional anti-Chávez strongholds of the business community and better-off urban dwellers. He has also managed to woo the country's poor who have always voted for Chávez.

Capriles won the opposition primaries in a landslide six months ago and threw himself into retail politicking nationwide. He has ridden his motorbike into barrios, played basketball with teens and ingratiated himself with the poor exactly as Chávez did during his own presidential campaign 14 years ago.

Chávez's charisma, public relations skills and oratory are still with him despite many months of treatment for colon cancer. And he has unlimited access to Venezuela's oil profits, pouring cash into social projects for supporters. Even so, some in the barrios feel it is time for a change. Bolivarian socialism, Chávez's brainchild, is not doing its job, they say.

Miguel Calanon, 42, who lives in a house given to him by the government in the city of Caribia, just outside Caracas, is sticking with Chávez. "My life has changed," he says. "No other government has ever helped me."

Prior to Chávez, Venezuela was ruled for 40 years by two parties that colluded with each other to divvy up the country's spoils for their main supporters, leaving little for the poor.

Chávez tapped into the disdain for the country's elites, and Capriles has worked hard to drop any links with that past despite a wealthy background. His father was a successful businessman.

A lawyer, Capriles first got involved in politics when he beat a Chávez ally in Baruta municipality to win the mayor's office and oversaw a sharp reduction in crime. He has said he admires the leadership of former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who turned his country into a leader in emerging markets while maintaining social programs that lifted many out of poverty.

Both Chávez and Capriles have been darting all over Venezuela, from its borders with Brazil and Colombia through its jungles, plains and major cities, to get votes and show off their strength to the watching undecided sector of the electorate, which makes up roughly 15%, according to Luis Vicente Leon, head of Caracas-based polling firm Datanálisis.

During his career, Chávez has often been accused by opponents of heavy-handed election tactics, such as using thugs to break up the rallies of his opponents and denying them coverage on state-controlled television networks.

Three opposition activists were killed on Saturday by gunmen who, local media said, fired from a van branded with government logos. Capriles has pointed the finger for the violence directly at Chávez, who denies involvement.

Still, Capriles has managed to build an enthusiastic following once enjoyed only by Chávez. Chávez still maintains his fervent following.

"We have a duty as revolutionaries to defend our president," said Enrique Pinto, 53, at a Chávez rally in Charallave. "Another world is possible, without capitalism, just with socialism."

Chavez Faces Strongest Challenge This Weekend

Friday, October 5, 2012

Washington Times

By Guy Taylor, The Washington Times

With Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez facing the most serious re-election challenge of his 14-year reign, international observers are bracing for the possibility of social unrest if the outcome is close when voters go to the polls Sunday.

"I think the probability of upheaval and protests increases the closer the vote gets," said Christopher Sabatini, senior director of policy at the Americas Society and the Council of the Americas in New York.

A close vote count between Mr. Chavez and his fresh-faced challenger Henrique Capriles Radonski may trigger a street-level clash between viscerally opposed supporters of the two.

"There are rumors that Chavista armed organizations are ready to come down from the hills should Capriles win," said Mr. Sabatini. "The other side is that if Capriles loses in a squeaker, his supporters have some pretty good basis to claim fraud."

The prospect of an Election Day meltdown in Venezuela, home to the world's largest oil reserves, caps a dramatic campaign in which many wondered whether the 58-year-old Mr. Chavez would overcome a battle with cancer to run for a third consecutive presidential term.

Most polls going into the weekend showed a small lead for the Venezuelan president, who has made

international headlines over the past decade for being perhaps the world's most bombastic critic of the United States.

Outside observers credit Mr. Capriles, an energetic 40-year-old state governor, with harnessing a coalition of the nation's fractured opposition factions more effectively than any previous challenger to Mr. Chavez.

Mr. Capriles has won favor among many by hammering Mr. Chavez's failure to rein in violent crime that finds drug-smuggling and kidnapping to be rampant in Venezuela, where the homicide rate is among the highest in the world.

It is a platform Mr. Capriles hoped would open cracks in the cultlike popularity Mr. Chavez's has long enjoyed, especially among Venezuela's poor. They voted en masse for him six years ago after benefiting from socialist education and health care programs that he championed during his early years in power.

"I voted for him, but I regret it," Rosina Dambrosio, a homemaker in Caracas' largest low-income barrio told The Associated Press recently.

"He was going to modernize Venezuela and fight crime. And he also spoke so beautifully. I guess we trusted him too much. He still speaks nicely, but I don't believe him anymore."

Sunday's vote will be the best measure of how widely such views are shared.

"Capriles has run a great campaign, has momentum and is getting around, but Chavez is still in a very strong position," said Michael Shifter, who heads the Inter-American Dialogue think tank in Washington. "He still has a connection to a lot of Venezuelans."

The vote is being watched closely by officials at the State Department, who are all too aware of the delicate relationship that exists between Washington and Caracas.

Recent years have seen Venezuela remain a key oil partner to the United States, with U.S. companies buying a steady flow of Venezuelan crude, despite Mr. Chavez's close alliance to Iran, which is currently under heavy U.S. and international sanctions.

Mark Dubowitz, executive director for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington, describes the U.S.-Venezuela relationship as one of "antagonistic co-dependence."

"We're absolutely certain that Venezuela is in a deep economic relationship with Iran and that they're helping Iran circumvent sanctions, but we're also dependent on Venezuela for their crude oil and, as a result, we've allowed them a free pass," Mr. Dubowitz said.

Since the past several U.S. presidents from both sides of the aisle have done little to confront such circumstances, it remains to be seen how Venezuela might make its way into the upcoming foreign policy debates between President Obama and Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

Mr. Sabatini said the Romney camp may attempt to "make it look like the Obama administration has put U.S. security interests at risk by not being hard enough on Chavez, or by not keeping enough focus on Iran's activities in the hemisphere."

Questions, meanwhile, often swirl through Washington's foreign policy establishment over the extent to which Mr. Chavez seeks to militarize the socialist revolution that he has created in Venezuela.

During the course of the presidential campaign, he circulated a platform document titled "Proposal From the Fatherland's Candidate, Commander Hugo Chavez."

While much of it consists of fresh calls for grass-roots political participation among the nation's rural and urban populations, Mr. Sabatini said the document also advocates a significant expansion of executive control over the Venezuelan military.

"Right now, you still have a Venezuelan national guard, army and air force all with distinct flavors of higher-ups tied to Chavez's party in different ways. What he wants to do, according to his campaign platform, is erase that," he said.

Others say such portrayals of Mr. Chavez show how grossly most analysts in the U.S. have come to misinterpret the Venezuelan president's vision.

"If you read the stuff in the press here in the U.S., you'll get the impression that Chavez is somehow trying to become dictatorial by trying to control the military," said Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic Policy Research, a think tank in Washington.

"But I think what he's doing is really something that a democratic president ought to do," said Mr. Weisbrot, who noted that members of the Venezuelan military carried out a failed 2002 coup attempt against Mr. Chavez.

Son Of Controversial Mexican Politician Slain In Border Town

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Los Angeles Times

By Richard Fausset. Cecilia Sanchez Contributed To This Report.

MEXICO CITY — The son of a controversial Mexican politician was slain under mysterious circumstances in the border state of Coahuila on Wednesday, triggering an outpouring of condolences from the country's political class as well as speculation about the motives behind the shooting.

The body of Jose Eduardo Moreira Rodriguez was discovered by police late Wednesday on a rural road outside of Ciudad Acuña — across the Rio Grande from the west Texas town of Del Rio — shortly after he was reported missing, according to Homero Ramos, the Coahuila state prosecutor.

Moreira, 25, was the oldest son of Humberto Moreira, the former governor of Coahuila and the former president of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. Humberto Moreira quit as head of the national party, known as the PRI, in December after being embroiled in a financial scandal centered on falsified loan requests during his governorship, in which he left the state with more than \$3 billion in debts.

His son had been employed as a social programs coordinator for the state government, which is headed up by his uncle, Ruben Moreira. As part of that job, Jose Eduardo Moreira was reportedly known for touring the countryside without bodyguards, according to Mexican news reports.

As a border state, Coahuila has struggled mightily with the drug cartels in recent years, particularly the ruthless paramilitary band known as the Zetas. In some cases, the criminals have sparred with state government forces; in others, they have allegedly collaborated with government employees.

Recently, Coahuila has been the scene of particularly intense clashes between government forces and various outlaw bands after an audacious prison break last month, believed to have been orchestrated by the Zetas gang, in which more than 130 inmates escaped through the front door.

On Wednesday afternoon, state government forces reportedly killed five alleged criminals during a shootout in the Coahuila city of Piedras Negras. That has fueled a theory that the slaying

of Jose Eduardo Moreira could have been an act of reprisal against the government.

The administration of outgoing Mexican President Felipe Calderon, while not endorsing this theory, issued a statement Thursday saying it would not tolerate "attempts at intimidation" on the part of criminals.

Ramos, the state prosecutor, said in a news conference Thursday that "no hypothesis will be ruled out" and added that federal police, prosecutors and military personnel were taking part in the investigation.

The finance scandal involving the victim's father had been viewed as a public relations embarrassment for the PRI during this year's presidential campaign, in which its candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto — now the president-elect — promised that the party had turned over a new leaf.

The PRI ran Mexico for most of the 20th century in an authoritarian manner that was often marked by graft and political chicanery.

After leaving public life, Humberto Moreira has remade himself as an entrepreneur, rolling out a line of sugar-free jams and jellies.

"They killed my son Jose Eduardo, a clean young man, a social activist who was dedicated to working with the most humble people of Acuña, Coahuila," Moreira said in a statement given to the newspaper Mileno.

Peña Nieto, the president-elect, said on his Twitter account that the slaying "should not go unpunished."

Calderon, the outgoing president, called the slaying "a cowardly assassination."

Cuba: Blogger Detained As Trial Begins

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Elisabeth Malkin

The Cuban authorities detained the dissident blogger Yoani Sánchez for 30 hours before releasing her late Friday. Ms. Sanchez was arrested Thursday with her husband near Bayamo while on her way to cover the trial of a Spanish politician charged in connection with the death of two dissidents in a car crash, according to news reports and human rights monitors.

Pro-government blogs said Ms. Sanchez and her husband were driven back to Havana, 500 miles west of Bayamo, by the Cuban authorities. Ms. Sánchez had been assigned by the Spanish

newspaper El País to cover the trial of the politician, Ángel Carromero, who is charged with the equivalent of vehicular manslaughter. The dissidents Oswaldo Payá and Harold Cepero died when the car Mr. Carromero was driving crashed on July 22.

On her blog and in Twitter posts, Ms. Sanchez, 37, has criticized the government, which has refused to give her a visa to leave Cuba. A pro-government Cuban blogger, Yohandry Fontana, accused Ms. Sánchez of planning to provoke "a media show" to disrupt the trial, which began Friday.

Cuba Arrests Yoani Sanchez, A Well-known Anti-Castro Blogger
Saturday, October 6, 2012
Washington Post
 By William Booth

Late Friday, however, Sanchez tweeted that she was released from custody after 30 hours.

Cuban officials declined to comment on her detention. In Cuba, dissidents are sometimes arrested and held for a day or two and released without charges — a technique that groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have condemned.

"There are few details about the detention, is almost like a kidnapping, an abduction," said Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo, a fellow blogger. "She was on the street yesterday between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., arriving in Bayamo, the authorities were waiting for her, they cut off their cellphones and then made the arrest."

News of her arrest was first reported by a pro-government Web site, which said authorities were concerned that Sanchez would turn the trial into a "media show."

Sanchez, an award-winning social media maven and political activist, is more popular off the island than on it, partly because of limited access to the Internet in Cuba.

Her Spanish-language blog, "Generation Y," is translated into English and runs regularly on the Huffington Post.

Her editorials about Cuba — echoing her frustrations with her country's heavy-handed state and limited freedoms — have appeared in The Washington Post and the New York Times. Sanchez's blog details the daily travails of ordinary Cubans and the harassment she and other activists face.

She has been repeatedly denied permission to travel.

Her critics say that her projects are paid for by the U.S. government and Cuban exile organizations trying to overturn the Cuban revolution.

Sanchez was en route to Bayamo to attend the trial of Spanish activist Angel Carromero, charged with vehicular manslaughter in a July highway crash in which Cuban dissidents Oswaldo Paya and Harold Cepero died.

Paya's family and others accused the Cuban government of playing a role in the accident.

Cuban prosecutors, however, charge that Carromero, who heads the youth wing of Spain's ruling party, was driving at excessive speeds in a small rental car when he lost control on an unpaved road under repair and crashed into a tree. Paya and Cepero were in the back seat and were not wearing seat belts.

Carromero and Swedish political activist Jens Aron Modig were in the front seats, wearing seat belts and were mostly unharmed.

Kerenia Nunez Perez of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said Sanchez might be held only a day or two — just long enough to keep her away from the trial.

She said such arrests are common.

"Yoani is a person known worldwide, she has prestige, and so it is not convenient for the authorities to make a greater public spectacle, to keep her detained for long without cause," she said.

Gabriela Martinez contributed to this report.

Rage In Guatemala Over Killings Of 7 Protesters

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Moises Castillo And Romina Ruiz-goiriena, Associated Press

TOTONICAPAN, Guatemala (AP) — Thousands of indigenous Guatemalans shouted in anger Friday and some threw themselves at the coffins of six local people who were shot to death during a protest over electricity prices and educational reform in a poor rural area.

A seventh victim died later at a hospital in the western city of Quezaltenango.

President Otto Perez Molina acknowledged that government forces had opened fire during the protest Thursday, after saying earlier that police

and troops on the scene had been unarmed and the protesters had provoked the clash.

Human rights groups condemned the government's actions and charged they were part of a pattern of excessive use of force against protesters.

The protesters were blockading a highway near the town of Totonicapan, about 90 miles west of Guatemala City, when two vehicles carrying soldiers arrived to help police who had been ordered to evict the demonstrators. Gunfire erupted after the troops came. Bullets killed seven people and wounded 34, officials said.

"We were protesting right next to them when they opened fire on us," said Rolando Carrillo, a 25-year-old protester with a bandaged arm and lacerated face that he said resulted from being hit during the clash.

The president told reporters Friday afternoon that armed security guards had driven the soldiers to the protest. One of the guards apparently was the first to start shooting and then an unspecified number of others fired at the crowd, Molina said.

He said seven soldiers injured in the confrontation had said they only fired into the air to protect themselves from what they considered to be a threatening crowd.

Interior Minister Mauricio Lopez Bonilla said the president had suspended the order to evict the protesters from the highway.

Some 20 human rights organizations called an emergency meeting in the capital to discuss the incident and called for a protest in front of the presidential palace.

"We've been saying for a long time that the army's use of force brings with it the risk that something like this could happen," said Francisco Soto, a representative of the Center for Legal Action and Human Rights.

Six of the dead were buried Friday afternoon in Totonicapan, where thousands gathered to watch their coffins pass through the town's central square. Hundreds shouted "Justice! Justice!" while dozens of mourners hurled themselves toward the coffins in grief.

Thursday's protest was fueled by anger at Molina, who has proposed constitutional reforms that he says will modernize Guatemala's economic and regulatory systems.

Among other changes, the reforms would set price caps on electricity, and require teachers to get a

five-year bachelor's degree instead of a three-year vocational degree.

The protesters think the price caps are too high, and object to the longer process for obtaining a degree that many in the subsistence-farming area depend on to improve their livelihoods.

In a protest in May, about 200 people armed with machetes and guns briefly seized an army outpost in a province bordering Mexico to demand justice for the killing of a man who opposed the construction of a hydroelectric plant. Molina responded by declaring a state of siege in the area and granting the army emergency powers.

Associated Press writer Moises Castillo reported this story in Totonicapan and Romina Ruiz-Goiriena reported from Guatemala City.

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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Nigeria: Sabotaged Phone Lines Worsen Crisis

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Haruna Umar, Associated Press

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria (AP) — Sabotaged phone lines prevented students from warning friends and possibly saving their lives in the attack in which 22 college students were killed earlier this week, survivors said Friday.

Assailants attacked student accommodation in the northeastern town of Mubi late Monday, shooting some and stabbing others to death, near Federal Polytechnic Mubi, a college in the northeastern town of Mubi. Police say they killed at least 22 students and three others.

John Bello, a Mubi college student, said Friday that only one mobile phone network was working in the town and that it was congested.

"We could maybe have alerted some of those that were killed if the networks weren't down," Bello said.

"Many students didn't find out what happened until they saw students running (away)," said Danjuma Aiso, another student. "When we tried to call those in the affected area, our calls didn't go through," he added.

Also said he heard gunshots for about five hours from his hiding place. However, Adamawa state police spokesman Ibrahim Mohammed said the attacks ended much more quickly although he could not say Friday how long authorities believe they lasted. He said police are still investigating and that there had been no arrests. No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Days after the killings hit the secluded college, many questions remain about what actually happened. Sabotaged phone lines are partly to blame for the information vacuum as people in the town struggle to communicate with those in other parts of Nigeria.

The killings came a month after the radical Islamist sect known as Boko Haram attacked more than 20 phone masts in Nigeria's north that effectively crippled communications in some areas.

In Nigeria, home to more than 160 million people, mobile phones are the main method of communication in both cities and rural communities. Landlines remain almost nonexistent, as the state-run telephone company has collapsed and repeated efforts to privatize it have failed. More 87 million mobile phone lines were in use in 2009, according to estimates.

Days after the attack, the difficult communications are still having a negative effect.

Police has not yet notified next-of-kin, Mohammed said Friday, leaving parents like Dauda Mbaya dreading that their children may be among the dead.

"Someone told me (my daughter) is OK, but I have not heard from her yet," Mbaya, a journalist based in Maiduguri, a city some 100 miles (170 kilometers) away, said Friday.

The Mubi killings show how the communication breakdown is making people even more anxious and vulnerable to widespread crime.

"The lack of good (phone networks) makes life very tough and insecure for us," said Abba Ado, a security guard at a bank in the Maiduguri, "Each time we hear bomb blasts or gun shots, we become agitated, because we cannot get across to our wives at home or our children at school."

Yuguda Ibrahim, a cameraman, said his neighbor's pregnant wife could not call her husband as she started to feel labor pains.

"She almost died because all the calls she tried to place across to her husband wouldn't get through," said Ibrahim. "The child was already

coming out when my wife heard her groaning and helped her deliver in their bedroom."

Yinka Ibukun contributed to this report from Lagos, Nigeria.

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American Jihadist Struggles Inside Somali Militia

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Washington Post

By Sudarsan Raghavan

After arriving in Somalia in 2006, he joined the Islamist

al-Shabab militia, fighting U.S.-backed African Union forces. And in Marka, he ruled. "Everybody feared him," said Omar Salim, a resident.

Amriki, whose real name is Omar Shafik Hammami, has been the al-Qaeda-linked militia's most visible face, using YouTube, Facebook and other social media Web sites to spread the militants' propaganda. In some videos, he raps, praising jihad and extremist Islam. He was indicted in the United States on charges of terrorist activities, and a federal warrant was issued for his arrest in 2007.

But in recent months, there have been noticeable shifts in his rhetoric, from defiance to fear to a quest for survival and relevance. In one video, the now 28-year-old has portrayed himself as a victim facing a death sentence ordered by his own comrades. He has even penned the first part of an online autobiography in which he describes himself as "a middle-class white guy" who can "only pray that Allah grants me a righteous ending."

Amriki's journey is a reflection of the divisions and struggle for identity within the militia itself, according to Western and Somali security experts, as it suffers major losses on the battlefield. A visit with African Union forces to Marka, in a swath of territory the militia once controlled, provided an on-the-ground look into the jihadist life of Amriki and other foreign fighters, as well as the militia's current state.

At its height, al-Shabab controlled large swaths of southern Somalia, including economically vital ports, and much of the capital, Mogadishu. But over the last year, it has lost control of Mogadishu and other bases of power. It has also lost large

sources of revenue, as well as the support of many of Somalia's powerful clans.

Now, as a major military offensive by Somalia's neighbors has taken control of Kismayo, the extremists' last — and most lucrative — stronghold, the future of the Islamist movement, as it now exists, is in doubt.

Whether al-Shabab transforms into a full-blown and violent insurgency and whether it remains focused on Somalia or becomes part of a broader jihad against the West and its allies remain in question. To survive, analysts say, the militia could formally link up with other al-Qaeda affiliates, such as the one in Yemen, a three-hour boat ride from Somalia.

"The Shabab is really struggling to define itself," said J. Peter Pham, director of the Atlantic Council's Michael S. Ansari Africa Center in Washington. "Al-Amriki is jockeying for a place in whatever version of Shabab evolves after the fall of Kismayo."

Western and Somali security officials say he is no longer in favor inside the militia, although he still has support from some leaders.

"I don't have any idea of where he is," said Hammami. "We have not heard from him."

He has been following his son's trail on the Internet and has read his autobiography, Hammami said. He is also closely watching the recent events unfolding in Somalia and hopes his son will emerge unscathed.

"I just hope and pray for his safety," said Hammami. "It's all in God's hands."

"He was preaching to us";

Amriki grew up in Daphne. His father is Muslim and was born in Syria. His mother is of Irish heritage and was raised Baptist. In high school, he began to identify more with Islam, and by the time he attended the University of South Alabama, he had embraced Salafism, an ultraconservative brand of the faith.

He later settled in Toronto, where he married a Canadian of Somali ancestry, and within a few years he moved to Egypt. In 2006, Amriki left his wife and baby daughter and traveled to Somalia, where he received ideological and arms training. The next year, he was indicted in the United States.

"The Americans fear that their cultural barrier has been broken, and now jihad has become a normal career choice of any youthful American Muslim," Amriki wrote in his autobiography.

Somalis who waged jihad in Afghanistan with Osama bin Laden created and lead al-Shabab, which in Arabic means "the youth"; The militia's goal is to overthrow Somalia's weak government and create a caliphate in the Horn of Africa.

By 2009, foreign fighters, including Pakistanis, Arabs and other Africans, were gaining influence inside al-Shabab, importing al-Qaeda's ideology and brutal tactics from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan into what was a moderate Muslim nation. These fighters were the main link to al-Qaeda's central body in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and they trained new recruits, both in weapons and ideology, according to Somali and Western officials.

A number of Americans, mostly of Somali descent, were also drawn to the militia. In September 2009, a Somali American from Seattle drove a truck bomb into an African Union base in Mogadishu, killing 21 soldiers.

Amriki's role was more inspirational. He appeared in numerous recruitment videos posted on jihadist and religious Web sites. He spoke mostly in English, addressing a largely Western audience, in some ways similar to the role Yemeni American cleric Anwar al-Awlaki played inside al-

Qaeda's Yemen affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, before he was killed last year in a U.S. drone strike in southern Yemen.

From Marka, Amriki controlled al-Shabab's military tactics in the region, according to Western and Somali security officials. "He was a strong commander inside al-Shabab, training fighters and leading operations," said Capt. Mohammed Shahban, a Somali military officer who coordinated with informants in Marka before it fell.

In Marka, Amriki and other foreign fighters attended the local mosque, but rarely interacted with the locals. He received income from transporting goods using donkey carts and other small businesses that paid him a share of their profits, Shahban said.

Selling himself as a jihadist

In a March video, Amriki accused the al-Shabab leadership of trying to assassinate him over

differences about the implementation of Islamic law, or sharia, in areas under the militia's control.

"It was a very desperate move on his part," said Abdirashid Hashi, a Somalia analyst with the International Crisis Group. "Maybe he was using it to pressure other international jihadists to speak to al-Shabab and spare his life."

In statements on jihadist Web sites, the militia's leaders denied that they were trying to kill Amriki.

Still, within days of the denial, reports emerged that Amriki had been arrested; some even declared that he had been beheaded.

Al-Shabab has never been completely unified. It is a collection of hard-core extremists, foreign fighters and Somali nationalists. There were sharp differences within the leadership over the use of harsh sharia laws on the population and whether to support a global jihadist agenda or focus solely on turning Somalia into an Islamist emirate. The militia's decision to formally align itself with al-Qaeda in February 2010, which Amriki supported, also triggered divisions.

Later that year, the militia orchestrated back-to-back bombings in the Ugandan capital of Kampala that killed more than 70 people watching the World Cup finals — an attack that was widely seen as the influence of the foreigners inside al-Shabab.

In May, Amriki released another video. This time, he was calling for radical Islamist groups around the world to unite under a single caliphate. Around the same time, he published his online autobiography, signing it "still alive and well." In other videos, he depicts himself as a religious figure or as a unifier of global jihadist groups in an apparent effort to raise his stature in extremist circles.

His actions suggest that he's concerned about his future, analysts and security officials say. Some foreign fighters are already leaving Somalia, heading to other parts of Africa and Yemen, where Islamists are actively seeking to undermine governments, U.S. and Somali officials say.

"He's trying to sell himself to a broader world market," said a Western diplomat in Nairobi who follows Somalia closely. "He realizes that he may want to go to Nigeria or Yemen."

Relief and wariness

Over the summer, Amriki and other foreign fighters left Marka, and African Union and Somali government forces entered without much of a fight. Today, there's a sense of relief among the people. As in other areas it controlled, the militia imposed brutal decrees, banning Western-style haircuts, music, soccer and other acts they consider un-

Islamic, as well as amputating the hands of alleged thieves and stoning teenage girls accused of adultery. They also exacted taxes on residents as a source of funding.

"If I had cut my hair in the style I want, they would have beaten me," said Ali Oban, 15, whose hair was cropped short. "We didn't have freedoms";

Yet there's also a sense of fear. In interviews, many residents were reluctant to speak about the militia, particularly the foreign fighters. There have been recent explosions in the town. At least four grenades have been thrown at African Union vehicles. Soldiers were recently tipped off to a large weapons cache hidden inside a house, which included antitank weaponry, a sign that the militia was perhaps preparing for a full-blown guerrilla war.

(The Washington Post/Source: The Washington Post) — Marka, Somalia

Private Army Formed To Fight Somali Pirates Leaves Troubled Legacy

Friday, October 5, 2012

New York Times

By Mark Mazzetti And Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON — It seemed like a simple idea: In the chaos that is Somalia, create a sophisticated, highly trained fighting force that could finally defeat the pirates terrorizing the shipping lanes off the Somali coast.

But the creation of the Puntland Maritime Police Force was anything but simple. It involved dozens of South African mercenaries and the shadowy security firm that employed them, millions of dollars in secret payments by the United Arab Emirates, a former clandestine officer with the Central Intelligence Agency, and Erik Prince, the billionaire former head of Blackwater Worldwide who was residing at the time in the emirates.

And its fate makes the story of the pirate hunters for hire a case study in the inherent dangers in the outsourced wars in Somalia, where the United States and other countries have relied on proxy

forces and armed private contractors to battle pirates and, increasingly, Islamic militants.

That strategy has had some success, including a recent offensive by Kenyan and African Union troops to push the militant group Al Shabab from its stronghold in the port city of Kismayu.

But with the antipiracy army now abandoned by its sponsors, the hundreds of half-trained and well-armed members of the Puntland Maritime Police Force have been left to fend for themselves at a desert camp carved out of the sand, perhaps to join up with the pirates or Qaeda-linked militants or to sell themselves to the highest bidder in Somalia's clan wars — yet another dangerous element in the Somali mix.

A United Nations investigative group described the effort by a company based in Dubai called Sterling Corporate Services to create the force as a "brazen, large-scale and protracted violation" of the arms embargo in place on Somalia, and has tried to document a number of grisly cases in which Somali trainees were beaten and even killed. In one case in October 2010, according to the United Nations group, a trainee was hogtied with his arms and feet bound behind his back and beaten. The group said the trainee had died from his injuries, an accusation disputed by the company.

Sterling has portrayed its operation as a bold private-sector attempt to battle the scourge of piracy where governments were failing. Lafras Luitingh, a senior manager for the project, described the October 2010 occurrence as a case of "Somali-on-Somali violence" that was not indicative of the overall training program. He said that the trainee had recovered from his injuries, and that "the allegations reflect not the professional training that occurred but the fact that professional training was needed," he said.

A lawyer for the company, Stephen Heifetz, wrote an official response to the United Nations report, calling it "a collection of unsubstantiated and often false innuendo assembled by a group with extreme views regarding participants in Somali politics."

Sterling officials have pointed out that in March, a United Nations counterpiracy organization — a separate entity from the investigative group that criticized Sterling — praised the semiautonomous Somali region of Puntland for creating the program. Moreover, the company argues, Somalia already is a playground for clandestine operations, with the C.I.A. now in the midst of an extensive effort to arm and equip Somali spies. Why, they

ask, is Sterling Corporate Services singled out for criticism?

Concerned about the impact of piracy on commercial shipping in the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates has sought to take the lead in battling Somali pirates, both overtly and in secret by bankrolling operations like Sterling's.

American officials have said publicly that they never endorsed the creation of the private army, but it is unclear if Sterling had tacit support from parts of the United States government. For instance, the investigative group reported in July that the counterpiracy force shared some of the same facilities as the Puntland Intelligence Service, a spy organization answering to Puntland's president, Abdirahman Farole, that has been trained by C.I.A. officers and contractors for more than a decade.

With the South African trainers gone, the African Union has turned to a different security contractor, Bancroft Global Development, based in Washington, to assess whether the pirate hunters in Puntland can be assimilated into the stew of other security forces in Somalia sanctioned both by the United States and the African Union. Among those groups are a 10,000-man Somali national army and troops of Somalia's National Security Agency, based in Mogadishu, which is closely allied with the C.I.A.

Michael Stock, Bancroft's president, said a team of his that recently visited the camp where the Puntland force is based witnessed something out of the Wild West: nearly 500 soldiers who had gone weeks without pay wandering the main compound and two other small camps, an armory of weapons amassed over two years at their disposal.

Although the force is far from the 1,000-man elite unit with helicopters and airplanes described in the United Nations report, Mr. Stock and independent analysts said the Puntland soldiers still posed a potential threat to the region if left unchecked.

"Sterling is leaving behind an unpaid but well-armed security force in Puntland," said Andre Le Sage, a senior research fellow who specializes in Africa at the National Defense University in Washington. "It's important to find a way to make them part of a regular force or to disarm them and take control of them. If that's not done, it could make things worse."

Mr. Stock, whose company trains soldiers from Uganda and Burundi for counterinsurgency missions in Somalia under the African Union

banner, said Bancroft would not take over Sterling's counterpiracy mission.

The Sterling operation was shrouded in a degree of secrecy from the time Mr. Luitingh and a small group of South Africans traveling in a private plane first touched down in Bosasso, Puntland's capital, in 2010. The men worked for Saracen International, a South African private military firm hired by the emirates and composed of several former members of the Civil Cooperation Bureau, the feared paramilitary squad during the apartheid era.

The following year, after The New York Times wrote about the operation, Saracen hired a prominent Washington law firm to advocate for the mission at the State Department and the Pentagon, and a rebranding campaign began. A new company, Sterling Corporate Services, was created in Dubai to oversee the training in Puntland. It was an attempt to put distance between the Somalia operations and Saracen's apartheid-era past, but some of the officers of the two companies were the same.

Two well-connected Americans were also involved in the project. Michael Shanklin, a former C.I.A. station chief in Mogadishu, was hired to tap a network of contacts both in Washington and East Africa to build support for the counterpiracy force. More significant was the role of Mr. Prince, who had become an informal adviser to the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheik Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Former company employees said Mr. Prince made several trips to the Puntland camp to oversee the counterpiracy training.

At the time, Mr. Prince was also involved in a project to train Colombian mercenaries at a desert camp in the emirates to carry out missions at the behest of the Emirati government.

But the emirates' refusal to publicly acknowledge their role in the operation, or to make a formal case to the United Nations Security Council to receive permission to build the army under the terms of the Somalia arms embargo, drew the ire of United Nations arms monitors, who repeatedly pressed the emirates to shut down the mission.

Lawyers for Sterling gave extensive briefings on the program to the State Department, the Pentagon and various United Nations agencies dealing with piracy.

Yousef Al Otaiba, the emirates' ambassador to Washington, declined to comment for this article.

American officials said they had urged Sterling's lawyers, from the firm of Steptoe & Johnson, to

have the operation approved by the Security Council. Mr. Heifetz, the company's lawyer, said Puntland and other Somali authorities did receive permission to build the police force. A spokeswoman for the State Department said the United States government never approved Sterling's activities.

"We share the monitoring group's concerns about the lack of transparency regarding the Saracen and Sterling Corporate Services' train-and-equip program for the Puntland Maritime Police Force, as well as the abuses alleged to have occurred during the training," said Hilary Renner, a State Department spokeswoman, referring to the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, the investigative arm.

For Sterling, the beginning of the end came in April, when one of the South Africa trainers, Lodewyk Pieterse, was shot dead by one of the Somali men he had been training to chase pirates. Sterling said in a statement that the death was an isolated occurrence and that the trainee accused in the killing had been arrested. "The murder was an aberrational incident involving a particular trainee who was not well suited" to the police force, the statement said. After the death, it said, Sterling tightened its screening of applicants for the Puntland force.

But there would be no need for that. By the end of June, Sterling whisked the rest of its trainers and their equipment out of the country, and the Puntland force was left on its own.

Veteran Zimbabwe Diplomat, Academic Dies Saturday, October 6, 2012 Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — State radio says Zimbabwe's former foreign minister Stan Mudenge has died. He was 71.

The radio on Friday reported Mudenge collapsed before giving a speech at a meeting of academics in the southern town of Masvingo.

A loyalist of President Robert Mugabe's party, he was the foreign minister for a decade after serving as the country's chief diplomat at the United Nations for five years. At the time of his death Thursday he was the higher education minister in charge of universities and colleges.

Mudenge had received treatment for a heart condition. As an academic and historian, his writings on ancient African civilizations became school textbooks after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 that debunked much of the colonial-era

teaching on a 14th Century tribal dynasty from which Zimbabwe draws its name.

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Platinum Company Fires 12,000 Striking Miners In South Africa

Saturday, October 6, 2012

New York Times

By Lydia Polgreen

JOHANNESBURG — The world's top platinum producer fired 12,000 workers who refused to return to work on Friday, apparently an attempt by the company to stem the tide of wildcat strikes that have shaken South Africa's mining industry and unsettled Africa's biggest economy.

The move by the company, Anglo American Platinum, is likely to heighten tensions in South Africa amid a wave of sometimes violent and illegal strikes by workers at platinum, gold and iron ore mines. Last week, Moody's downgraded South Africa's bond rating for the first time since 1994, and the country's currency, the rand, has weakened in recent days.

The mining industry has been in turmoil since Aug. 16, when the police opened fire on miners who had gathered outside a mine in Marikana, killing 34 and wounding dozens more. About 75,000 miners are believed to be on strike, representing nearly a fifth of the industry's work force.

Anglo American Platinum said Friday that just 20 percent of its workers had been showing up at its shafts, forcing the closing of the company's entire operation in the Rustenburg area, home to the world's richest platinum deposit.

Leaders of the African National Congress, South Africa's governing party, have struggled to contain the mining crisis despite their deep ties to trade unions. The wildcat strikes have been initiated by rival unions that criticize the A.N.C. and the traditional unions as being too complacent now that they are in power.

On Friday, a branch leader for the country's largest mineworkers union, the National Union of Mineworkers, which is closely allied with the A.N.C., was shot to death near a mine run by Lonmin, the company at the heart of the deadly unrest in Marikana, Reuters reported. A union spokesman was quoted as saying that the leader had been killed "execution-style."

Platinum Producer Fires Striking SAfrican Miners

Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Rodney Muhumuza, Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Anglo American Platinum fired 12,000 striking miners Friday for staging an unlawful strike that is one of several that are slowly paralyzing South Africa's crucial mining sector.

About 80,000 miners, representing 16 percent of the country's mine workforce, are currently striking in a wave of wildcat work stoppages that have serious economic and political implications for South Africa.

Strike leader Gaddafi Mdoda, a mineworker at Anglo American Platinum, or Amplats, said he was one of the workers who received emails or SMS messages telling them they had been dismissed.

"Things are bad here," Mdoda said. The strike leader said he was shocked by the decision to dismiss striking workers, even though "it is nothing to be afraid of."

"Approximately 12,000 striking employees chose not to make representations, nor attend the hearings, and have therefore been dismissed in their absence," a statement from Amplats said, according to the South African Press Agency.

Mary Jane Morifi, a spokeswoman for Anglo American Platinum declined to comment, saying a detailed statement would be issued later Friday.

Violence has been reported at the company's Rustenburg mines, with police firing tear gas and rubber bullets Thursday to disperse striking miners armed with sticks and other crude weapons. A striking miner's dead body was discovered Friday morning, the apparent victim of rubber bullets to the stomach, said Mdoda.

Amplats is the world's largest platinum producer and South Africa produces 75 percent of the world's platinum.

The ANC Youth League, reacting to the dismissal of striking mineworkers, described Amplats as "a disgrace and a disappointment to the country at large, a representation of white monopoly capital out of touch and uncaring of the plight of the poor."

The Youth League said the mass firings "demonstrates the insensibility and insensitivity of the company ... which has made astronomical profits on the blood, sweat and tears of the very

same workers that today the company can just fire with impunity."

Mdoda, the strike leader, said the fired miners would intensify their strike, even if they were no longer bona fide employees of Amplats. At least 20,000 mineworkers at Amplats have been staging a wildcat strike since Sept. 12, demanding 12,500 rand (about \$1,500) in take-home pay. Amplats managers said from the start that the strike, which brought the company's operations in Rustenburg to a standstill, is unlawful.

South Africa's mining industry has been in turmoil since August, when mineworkers at a platinum mine staged a wildcat strike that led to police shooting and killing 34 workers in Marikana, shocking a nation that had not witnessed such a level of violence since the end of apartheid.

There seems to be no end in sight to the labor unrest, which has spread to coal and iron ore mines as well as to the road freight sector. Some 20,000 truckers demanding a 22 percent pay raise are currently staging a strike that threatens the supply of gas and groceries. Negotiations between striking truckers and the Road Freight Association "broke down" Thursday night, according to Vincent Masoga, a spokesman for the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union, which called the strike.

Masoga said the union would keep the strike going until negotiations resume. The Road Freight Employers Association, which has offered the truckers a pay increase of up to 8.5 percent, said Friday it had obtained a court order compelling the truckers' union to manage its strike in a way that avoids violence of the sort that has led to some trucks being set on fire.

"In essence, the order made it tougher on the unions to continue with irregular strike action," the Road Freight Association, which lost an application to block the strike from proceeding, said in a statement Friday.

The labor unrest has damaged South Africa's reputation as an investment destination. South Africa produces 75 percent of the world's platinum and is the No. 4 chrome producer and the fifth-biggest gold producer.

South African President Jacob Zuma, the target of criticism by mineworkers who see him as aloof to their concerns, said Thursday that the violence witnessed in the mining sector was proof that "a climate of constructive social dialogue" needs to be created in the country.

"We should not seek to portray ourselves as a nation that is perpetually fighting," Zuma told South Africa's Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

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Seized Argentine Ship Remains In Ghana Saturday, October 6, 2012

Associated Press

By Francis Kokutse, Associated Press

TEMA, Ghana (AP) — Ghanaian officials on Friday refused to release an Argentine naval ship that was seized in the West African nation due to a complaint by a U.S. hedge fund.

Officials of the Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority told The Associated Press they will release the ship only after they receive a court order. The tall ship ARA Libertad is being held at Tema port near the capital, Accra.

The complicated case involves players in three nations: Argentina, Ghana and the United States. The ARA Libertad is a three-masted tall ship that stopped at Tema while training hundreds of Argentinian navy cadets.

Asked for comment, the Ghanaian minister of information said he was not aware of the seizure of the ship. The public affairs officers of both the ministry of defense and the Ghana Armed Forces would not comment. Security personnel at the port refused entry to an AP reporter investigating the case.

The seizure of the flagship of Argentina's navy stems from a complaint from a U.S. hedge fund. Elliott Capital Management's lawyers have searched worldwide for ways of collecting on Argentine bonds bought at fire-sale prices after the South American country's record debt default a decade ago. The \$15 billion hedge fund is run by billionaire Paul Singer.

Most bondholders eventually agreed to cancel Argentina's bad debts for about 30 cents on the dollar, but Singer is among those holding out for the full promised value of those notes, plus interest. Courts in the United States and Britain have granted judgments worth \$1.6 billion to the hedge fund, but it and other bondholders are still suing for billions more. Argentina has refused to pay.

The Argentine foreign ministry says the seizure violates international law and that President Cristina Fernandez will not bend to extortion.

Diplomats are working with the African government to "clarify the trickery that these unscrupulous financiers have mounted," the ministry said.

A court in Ghana on Tuesday ordered the ship to be held in port until Argentina posts a court bond equal to its value, which could be \$10 million or more. Singer would then try to collect that money.

"The vessel arrived at Tema on Monday and we received a court injunction for its seizure because of debts it owed in the U.S., soon after," said Kumi Adjei-Sam, marketing and corporate affairs manager of Ghana's ports and harbors authority. "We are only complying with the court order and whenever we receive information that the parties have resolved the issues involved, we would release the vessel which has 300 officers and men."

Argentinian authorities say the crew are fine.

"The crew is going on with their normal routine," and the treatment they've received from local authorities in Ghana is optimal, a navy spokesman in Buenos Aires said Friday, speaking under condition of anonymity according to military rules.

Argentina's ambassador in Nigeria, Maria Susana Pataro, is responsible for the South American nation's affairs in Ghana, and has been participating in negotiations with the authorities in Ghana to liberate the Libertad.

The decision by the court in Ghana forbidding the Libertad from leaving the port of Tema is all the more poignant given the stark contrasts between the small West African country and the Latin American regional power, said J. Peter Pham, director of the Africa program at the Washington-based Atlantic Council.

Argentina has twice the population, twelve times the GDP, and eight times the foreign exchange reserves of Ghana, Pham noted.

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